

THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

ELLERY QUEEN'S

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

APRIL 1989

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A Pair of Yellow Lilies

by
Ruth
Rendell

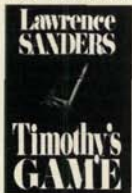
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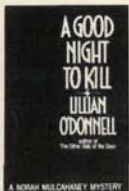
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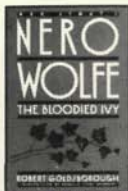
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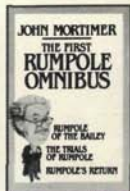
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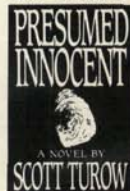
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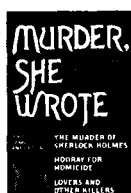
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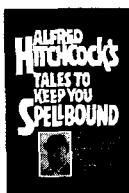
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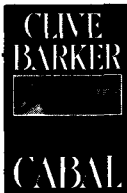
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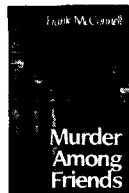
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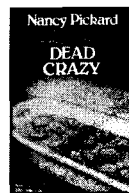
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"I'll lend you my black lace if you like," Elizabeth said. "It would suit you and it's suitable for absolutely everything."

Bridget wouldn't borrow the black lace. She refused to sail in under anyone else's colors. She wouldn't borrow Aunt Monica's emerald necklace, either—the one she had bought to replace the necklace the burglars took. Her black skirt and the velvet top from the secondhand shop in Hammersmith would be quite good enough. If she couldn't have an Annie Carter, she would rather not compromise . . .

A PAIR OF YELLOW LILIES

by RUTH RENDELL

A famous designer, young still, who first became well known when she made a princess's wedding dress, was coming to speak to the women's group of which Bridget Thomas was secretary. She would be the second speaker in the autumn program, which was devoted to success and how women had achieved it. Repeated requests on Bridget's part for a biography from Annie Carter so that she could provide her members with interesting background information had met with no response. Bridget had even begun to wonder if she would remember to come and give her talk in three weeks' time. Meanwhile, obliged to do her own research, she had gone into the public library to look Annie Carter up in *Who's Who*.

Bridget had a precarious job in a small and not very prosperous bookshop. In her mid-thirties, with a rather pretty face that often looked worried and worn, she thought that she might learn something from this current series of talks. Secrets of success might be imparted, blueprints for achievement, even shortcuts to prosperity. She never had enough money, never knew security, could not have dreamed of aspiring to an Annie Carter ready-to-wear even when

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such a garment had been twice marked down in a sale. Clothes, anyway, were hardly a priority, coming a long way down the list of essentials which was headed by rent, fares, and food, in that order.

In the library she was not noticeable. She was not, in any case and anywhere, the kind of woman on whom second glances were bestowed. On this Wednesday evening, when the shop closed at its normal time and the library later than usual, she could be seen by those few who cared to look wearing a long black skirt with a dusty appearance, a T-shirt of a slightly different shade of black—it had been washed fifty times at least—and a waistcoat in dark striped cotton. Her shoes were black-velvet Chinese slippers with instep straps and there was a hole she didn't know about in her turquoise-blue tights, low down on the left calf. Bridget's hair was wispy, long and fair, worn in loops. She was carrying an enormous black-leather bag, capacious and heavy, and full of unnecessary things. Herself the first to admit this, she often said she meant to make changes in the matter of this bag but she never got around to it.

This evening the bag contained a number of crumpled tissues, some pink, some white, a spray bottle of Wild Musk cologne, three ballpoint pens, a pair of nail scissors, a pair of nail clippers, a London tube pass, a British Telecom phone-card, an address book, a mascara wand in a shade called After-Midnight Blue, a checkbook, a notebook, a postcard from a friend on holiday in Brittany, a calculator, a paperback of Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*, which Bridget had always meant to read but was not getting on very fast with, a container of nasal spray, a bunch of keys, a book of matches, a silver ring with a green stone, probably onyx, a pheasant's feather picked up while staying for the weekend in someone's cottage in Somerset, three quarters of a bar of milk chocolate, a pair of sunglasses, and her wallet—which contained the single credit card she possessed, her bank-check card, her library card, her never-needed driving license, and seventy pounds, give or take a little, in five- and ten-pound notes. There was also about four pounds in change.

On the previous evening, Bridget had been to see her aunt. This was the reason for her carrying so much money. Bridget's Aunt Monica was an old woman who had never married and whom her brother, Bridget's father, referred to with brazen insensitivity as "a maiden lady." Bridget thought this outrageous and remonstrated with her father but was unable to bring him to see anything offensive in this expression. Though Monica had never had a husband, she had been successful in other areas of life, and might indeed almost

have qualified to join Bridget's list of female achievers fit to speak to her women's group. Inherited-money wisely invested brought her in a substantial income, and this added to the pension derived from having been quite high up the ladder in the Civil Service made her nearly rich.

Bridget did not like taking Monica Thomas's money. Or she told herself she didn't—actually meaning that she liked the money very much but felt humiliated, as a young healthy woman who ought to have been able to keep herself adequately, taking money from an old one who had done so and still did. Monica, not invariably during these visits but often enough, would ask her how she was managing.

"Making ends meet, are you?" was the form this inquiry usually took.

Bridget felt a little tide of excitement rising in her at these words because she knew they signified a coming munificence. She simultaneously felt ashamed at being excited by such a thing. This was the way, she believed, other women might feel at the prospect of lovemaking or discovering themselves pregnant or getting promotion. She felt excited because her old aunt, her maiden aunt tucked away in a gloomy flat in Fulham, was about to give her fifty pounds.

Characteristically, Monica prepared the ground. "You may as well have it now instead of waiting till I'm gone."

And Bridget would smile and look away—or, if she felt brave, tell her aunt not to talk about dying. Once she had gone so far as to say, "I don't come here for the sake of what you give me, you know," but as she put this into words she knew she did. And Monica, replying tartly, "And I don't see my little gifts as paying you for your visits," must have known that she did and they did, and that the two of them were involved in a commercial transaction, calculated enough, but imbrued with guilt and shame.

Bridget always felt that at her age, thirty-six, and her aunt's, seventy-two, it should be she who gave alms and her aunt who received them. That was the usual way of things. Here the order was reversed, and with a hand that she had to restrain forcibly from trembling with greed and need and excitement she had reached out on the previous evening for the notes that were presented as a sequel to another of Monica's favorite remarks, that she would like to see Bridget better dressed. With only a vague grasp of changes in the cost of living, Monica nevertheless knew that for any major changes in her niece's wardrobe to take place a larger than usual sum would

be required and another twenty-five had been added to the customary fifty.

Five pounds or so had been spent during the course of the day. Bridget had plenty to do with the rest, which did not include buying the simple dark coat and skirt and pink twinset Monica had suggested. There was the gas bill, for instance, and the chance at last of settling the credit-card account, on which interest was being paid at twenty-one percent. Not that Bridget had no wistful thoughts of beautiful things she would like to possess and most likely never would. A chair in a shop window in Bond Street, for instance, a chair which stood alone in slender, almost arrogant elegance, with its high-stepping legs and sweetly curved back, she imagined gracing her room as a bringer of daily renewed happiness and pride. Only today a woman had come into the shop to order the new Salman Rushdie and she had been wearing a dress that was unmistakably Annie Carter. Bridget had gazed at that dress as at some unattainable glory, at its bizarreries of zips round the sleeves and triangles excised from armpits, uneven hemline and slashed back, for if the truth were told it was the fantastic she admired in such matters and would not have been seen dead in a pink twinset.

She had gazed and longed, just as now, fetching *Who's Who* back to her seat at the table, she had stared in passing at the back of a glorious jacket. Afterward, she could not have said if it was a man or woman wearing it, a person in jeans was all she could have guessed at. The person in jeans was pressed fairly close up against the science-fiction shelves, so that the back of the jacket, its most beautiful and striking area, was displayed to the best advantage. The jacket was made of blue denim with a design applied on it. Bridget knew the work was applique because she had learned something of this technique herself at a handicrafts class, all part of the horizon-widening, life-enhancing program with which she combated loneliness. Patches of satin and silk and brocade had been used in the work, and beads and sequins and gold thread as well. The design was of a flock of brilliant butterflies, purple and turquoise and vermilion and royal blue and fuchsia pink, tumbling and fluttering from the open mouths of a pair of yellow lilies. Bridget had gazed at this fantastic picture in silks and jewels and then looked quickly away, resolving to look no more, she desired so much to possess it herself.

Annie Carter's *Who's Who* entry mentioned a book she had written on fashion in the early Eighties. Bridget thought it would be sensible

to acquaint herself with it. It would provide her with something to talk about when she and the committee entertained the designer to supper after her talk. Leaving *Who's Who* open on the table and her bag wedged between the table legs and the leg of her chair, Bridget went off to consult the library's computer as to whether the book was in stock.

Afterward she recalled, though dimly, some of the people she had seen as she crossed the floor of the library to where the computer was. An old man in gravy-brown clothes reading a newspaper, two old women in fawn raincoats and pudding-basin hats, a child that ran about in defiance of its mother's threats and pleas. The mother was a woman about Bridget's own age, grossly fat, with fuzzy dark hair and swollen legs. There had been other people less memorable. The computer told her the book was in stock but out on loan. Bridget went back to her table and sat down. She read the sparse *Who's Who* entry once more, noting that Annie Carter's interests were bob-sleighing and collecting netsuke, which seemed to make her rather a daunting person, and then she reached down for her bag and the notebook it contained.

The bag was gone.

The feeling Bridget experienced is one everyone has when they lose something important or think they have lost it, the shock of loss. It was a physical sensation, as of something falling through her—turning over in her chest first and then tumbling down inside her body and out through the soles of her feet. She immediately told herself she couldn't have lost the bag, she couldn't have done, it couldn't have been stolen—who would have stolen it among that company?—she must have taken it with her to the computer. Bridget went back to the computer, she ran back, and the bag wasn't there. She told the two assistant librarians and then the librarian herself and they all looked round the library for the bag. It seemed to Bridget that by this time everyone else who had been in the library had swiftly disappeared—everyone, that is, but the old man reading the newspaper.

The librarian was extremely kind. They were about to close and she said she would go to the police with Bridget, it was on her way. Bridget continued to feel the shock of loss, sickening overturnings in her body and sensations of panic and disbelief. Her head seemed too lightly poised on her neck, almost as if it floated.

"It can't have happened," she kept saying to the librarian. "I just

don't believe it could have happened in those few seconds I was away."

"I'm afraid it did," said the woman, who was too kind to say anything about Bridget's un wisdom in leaving the bag unattended even for a few seconds. "It's nothing to do with me, but was there much money in it?"

"Quite a lot. Yes, quite a lot." Bridget added humbly, "Well, a lot for me."

The police could offer very little hope of recovering the money. The bag, they said, and some of its contents might turn up. Meanwhile, Bridget had no means of getting into her room, no means even of phoning the credit-card company to notify them of the theft. The librarian, whose name was Elizabeth Derwent, saw to all that. She took Bridget to her own home and led her to the telephone and then took her to a locksmith. It was the beginning of what was to be an enduring friendship. Bridget might have lost so many of the most precious of her worldly goods, but as she said afterward to her Aunt Monica, at least she got Elizabeth's friendship out of it.

"It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good," said Monica, pressing fifty pounds in ten-pound notes into Bridget's hand.

But all this was in the future. That first evening, Bridget had to come to terms with the loss of seventy pounds, her driving license, her credit card, her checkbook, the *Lives of the Artists* (she would never read it now), her address book, and the silver ring with the stone which was probably onyx. She mourned, alone there in her room. She fretted miserably, shock and disbelief having been succeeded by the inescapable certainty that someone had deliberately stolen her bag. Several cups of strong hot tea comforted her a little. Bridget had more in common with her aunt than she would have liked to think possible, being very much a latter-day maiden lady in every respect but maidenhood.

At the end of the week, a parcel came. It contained her wallet (empty but for the library card), the silver ring, her address book, her notebook, the nail scissors and the nail clippers, the mascara wand in the shade called After-Midnight Blue, and most of the things she had lost but for the money and the credit card and the checkbook, the driving license, the paperback Vasari, and the bag itself. A letter accompanied the things. It said: "Dear Miss Thomas, This name and address were in the notebook. I hope they are yours and that this will reach you. I found your things inside a plastic bag on top of a

litter bin in Kensington Church Street. It was the wallet which made me think they were not things someone had meant to throw away. I am afraid this is absolutely all there was, though I have the feeling there was money in the wallet and other valuable things. Yours sincerely, Patrick Baker."

His address and phone number headed the sheet of paper. Bridget, who was not usually impulsive, was so immediately brimming with amazed happiness and restored faith in human nature that she lifted the phone at once and dialed the number. He answered. It was a pleasant voice, educated, rather slow and deliberate in its enunciation of words, a young man's voice. She poured out her gratitude. How kind he was! What trouble he had been to! Not only to retrieve her things but to take them home, to parcel them up, pay the postage, stand in a queue no doubt at the post office! What could she do for him? How could she show the gratitude she felt?

Come and have a drink with him, he said. Well, of course she would, of course. She promised to have a drink with him and a place was arranged and a time, though she was already getting cold feet. She consulted Elizabeth.

"Having a drink in a pub in Kensington High Street couldn't do any harm," said Elizabeth, smiling.

"It's not really something I do." It wasn't something she had done for years, at any rate. In fact, it was two years since Bridget had even been out with a man, since her sad affair with the married accountant which had dragged on year after year before it finally came to an end. Drinking in pubs had not been a feature of the relationship. Sometimes they had made swift furtive love in the small office where clients' VAT files were kept. "I suppose," she said, "it might make a pleasant change."

The aspect of Patrick Baker which would have made him particularly attractive to most women, if it did not repel Bridget at least put her off. He was too good-looking for her. He was, in fact, radiantly beautiful, like an angel or a young Swedish tennis player. This, of course, did not specially matter that first time. But his looks registered with her as she walked across the little garden at the back of the pub and he rose from the table at which he was sitting. His looks frightened her and made her shy. It would not have been true, though, to say that she could not keep her eyes off him. Looking at him was altogether too much for her, it was almost an embarrassment, and she tried to keep her eyes turned away.

Nor would she have known what to say to him. Fortunately, he was eager to recount in detail his discovery of her property in the litter bin in Kensington Church Street. Bridget was good at listening and she listened. He told her also how he had once lost a briefcase in a tube train and a friend of his had had his wallet stolen on a train going from New York to Philadelphia. Emboldened by these homely and not at all sophisticated anecdotes, Bridget told him about the time her Aunt Monica had burglars and lost an emerald necklace which fortunately was insured. This prompted him to ask more about her aunt and Bridget found herself being quite amusing, recounting Monica's financial adventures. She didn't see why she shouldn't tell him the origins of the stolen money and he seemed interested when she said it came from Monica, who was in the habit of bestowing like sums on her.

"You see, she says I'm to have it one day—she means when she's dead, poor dear—so why not now?"

"Why not indeed?"

"It was just my luck to have my wallet stolen the day after she'd given me all that money."

He asked her to have dinner with him. Bridget said all right, but it mustn't be anywhere expensive or grand. She asked Elizabeth what she should wear. They were in a clothes mood, for it was the evening of the Annie Carter talk to the women's group which Elizabeth had been persuaded to join.

"He doesn't dress at all formally himself," Bridget said. "Rather the reverse." He and she had been out for another drink in the meantime. "He was wearing this kind of safari suit with a purple shirt. But, oh, Elizabeth, he is amazing to look at. Rather too much so, if you know what I mean."

Elizabeth didn't. She said that surely one couldn't be too good-looking? Bridget said she knew she was being silly, but it embarrassed her a bit—well, being seen with him, if Elizabeth knew what she meant. It made her feel awkward.

"I'll lend you my black lace if you like," Elizabeth said. "It would suit you and it's suitable for absolutely everything."

Bridget wouldn't borrow the black lace. She refused to sail in under anyone else's colors. She wouldn't borrow Aunt Monica's emerald necklace, either—the one she had bought to replace the necklace the burglars took. Her black skirt and the velvet top from the secondhand shop in Hammersmith would be quite good enough. If she couldn't have an Annie Carter, she would rather not compromise.

Monica, who naturally had never been told anything about the married accountant or his distant predecessor, the married primary-school teacher, spoke as if Patrick Baker were the first man Bridget had ever been alone with, and spoke, too, as if marriage were a far from remote possibility. Bridget listened to all this while thinking how awful it would be if she were to fall in love with Patrick Baker and become addicted to his beauty and suffer when separated from him.

Even as she thought in this way, so prudently and with irony, she could see his face before her, its hawklike lineaments and its softnesses, the wonderful mouth and the large wide-set eyes, the hair that was fair and thick and the skin that was smooth and brown. She saw, too, his muscular figure, slender and graceful yet strong, his long hands and his tapering fingers, and she felt something long-suppressed, a prickle of desire that plucked very lightly at the inside of her and made her gasp a little.

The restaurant where they had their dinner was not grand or expensive, and this was just as well since at the end of the meal Patrick found that he had left his checkbook at home and Bridget was obliged to pay for their dinner out of the money Monica had given her to buy an evening dress. He was very grateful. He kissed her on the pavement outside the restaurant, or, if not quite outside it, under the archway that was the entrance to the mews. They went back to his place in a taxi.

He had quite a nice flat at the top of a house in Bayswater, not exactly overlooking the park but nearly. It was interesting what was happening to Bridget. Most of the time she was able to stand outside herself and view these deliberate acts of hers with detachment. She would have the pleasure of him, he was so beautiful, she would have it and that would be that. Such men were not for her, not at any rate for more than once or twice. But if she could once in a lifetime have one of them for once or twice, why not? Why not?

The life, too, the lifestyle, was not for her. On the whole, she was better off at home with a pot of strong hot tea and her embroidery or the latest paperback on changing attitudes to women in Western society. Nor had she any intention of sharing Aunt Monica's money when the time came. She had recently had to be stern with herself about a tendency, venal and degrading, to dream of that distant prospect when she would live in a World's End studio with a gallery, fit setting for the arrogant Bond Street chair, and dress in a bold,

eccentric manner, in flowing skirts and antique pelisses and fine old lace.

Going home with Patrick, she was rather drunk. Not drunk enough not to know what she was doing, but drunk enough not to care. She was drunk enough to shed her inhibitions while being sufficiently sober to know she had inhibitions, to know that they would be waiting to return to her later and to return quite unchanged. She went into Patrick's arms with delight, with the reckless abandon and determination to enjoy herself of someone embarking on a world cruise that must necessarily take place but once. Being in bed with him was not in the least like being in the VAT records office with the married accountant. She had known it would not be and that was why she was there. During the night the central heating went off, and failed, through some inadequacy of a fragile pilot light, to restart itself. It grew cold, but Bridget, in the arms of Patrick Baker, did not feel it.

She was the first to wake up. Bridget was the kind of person who is always the first to wake up. She lay in bed a little way apart from Patrick Baker and thought about what a lovely time she had had the night before and how that was enough and she would not see him again. Seeing him again might be dangerous and she could not afford, with her unmemorable appearance, her precarious job, and low wage, to put herself in peril. Presently she got up and said to Patrick, who had stirred a little and made an attempt in a kindly way to cuddle her, that she would make him a cup of tea.

Patrick put his nose out of the bedclothes and said it was freezing, the central heating had gone wrong, it was always going wrong. "Don't get cold," he said sleepily. "Find something to put on in the cupboard."

Even if they had been in the tropics, Bridget would not have dreamt of walking about a man's flat with no clothes on. She dressed. While the kettle was boiling, she looked with interest around Patrick's living room. There had been no opportunity to take any of it in on the previous evening. He was an untidy man, she noted, and his taste was not distinguished. You could see he bought his pictures ready-framed at Athena Art. He hadn't many books and most of what he had was science fiction, so it was rather a surprise to come upon Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* in paperback between a volume of fighting fantasy and a John Wyndham classic.

Perhaps she did, after all, feel cold. She was aware of a sudden

unpleasant chill. It was comforting to feel the warmth of the kettle against her hands. She made the tea and took him a cup, setting it down on the bedside table, for he was fast asleep again. Shivering now, she opened the closet door and looked inside.

He seemed to possess a great many coats and jackets. She pushed the hangers along the rail, sliding tweed to brush against serge and linen against wild silk. His wardrobe was vast and complicated. He must have a great deal to spend on himself. The jacket with the butterflies slid into sudden brilliant view as if pushed there by some stage manager of fate. Everything conspired to make the sight of it dramatic, even the sun which came out and shed an unexpected ray into the open closet. Bridget gazed at the denim jacket as she had gazed with similar lust and wonder once before. She stared at the cascade of butterflies in purple and vermilion and turquoise, royal blue and fuchsia pink that tumbled and fluttered from the open mouths of a pair of yellow lilies.

She hardly hesitated before taking it off its hanger and putting it on. It was glorious. She remembered that this was the word she had thought of the first time she had seen it. How she had longed to possess it and how she had not dared look for long lest the yearning became painful and ridiculous! With her head a little on one side, she stood over Patrick, wondering whether to kiss him goodbye. Perhaps not, perhaps it would be better not. After all, he would hardly notice.

She let herself out of the flat. They would not meet again. A more than fair exchange had been silently negotiated by her. Feeling happy, feeling very light of heart, she ran down the stairs and out into the morning, insulated from the cold by her coat of many colors, her butterflies, her rightful possession.



DETECTIVERSE

CHERCHEZ LE CHAT

by *ROSEMARY SLADE*

If I were planning murder,
I'd take the utmost care—
I'd emulate Macavity,
The cat who wasn't there.

When the victim swallowed poison
Or breathed in noxious air,
I'd emulate Macavity,
The cat who wasn't there.

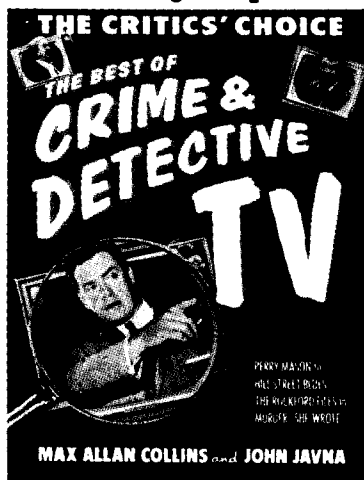
And when the victim's brakes failed
Or he toppled on the stair,
I'd emulate Macavity,
The cat who wasn't there.

And when the funeral's over
And I'd shed a solemn tear,
They'd look at me with will in hand
And say, "Your name's not here."

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Why some people go to bars—and some others never do . . .

THE USUAL

by J. W. WHITEHEAD

Jack came in about seven-thirty, right on time, took the drink I already had set up for him, went without a word and sat in the darkest corner of the bar. I already had the television off. In the background, through the open street door, I could just make out a Glenn Miller tune from the place two doors down. I recognized the sound of the band before I recognized the song. But after a while, I wasn't so sure I recognized the song after all.

The place just sat there for a few moments while he sipped his drink, and then, as if the bar itself was exhaling, soft talk began again. I couldn't hear the song at all any more.

A guy came in and sat at the bar, down the left-hand side where the fewest people were. He was a smiler, smiling at anyone whose eye he could catch. The smilers usually come for some free advice, a free ear to fill with some lonely poison. I gave him some room for a minute or two, to maybe let him find a friend.

"Don't you watch the game in here?"

I could hear the smile in his voice. I figured the smile had probably begun to hurt the corners of his mouth by now. No, I told him. Not usually.

"Well, do you mind?"

It would have been easy to tell him, no, I didn't, but Jack was already up and moving over to him.

"You know what I like about this place?" Jack said to him. "You know what I've always liked about this place?"

The guy looked at me, not at Jack—who went on. "You're acting like you're not listening, but I know you are. You could have moved when I first started talking, but you didn't. You may only be waiting for someone, that's really none of my business, but you could still wait somewhere else—down the other end of the bar, say. It's a long enough bar."

© 1989 by J. W. Whitehead.

"I'm not waiting for anyone."

"He speaks! Great. The reason I like this place so much is because they never let it get so loud in here you can't hear the rain outside. You know the sound I mean. Cars on the street, a faint hiss like you're playing a tape with nothing on it, a tape-recording of rain. You name me one person who doesn't like that sound. Just one."

"Couldn't say."

"And I'll tell you why. It's the first sound you or anyone else learned to love. Listen to that sound. It's the one sound that, every time you hear it, tells you things could be worse. You come in here often? I think I've seen you before, but maybe it was somewhere else."

"I've been here once or twice."

"I thought I'd seen you somewhere before. But once or twice doesn't qualify you. You need to be in a place regular. Do you go to anyplace regular?"

I said, "What are you drinking?"

"Pardon?" the guy said.

I said, "What are you drinking? You name it, we can get it."

"He'll have what I'm having, Michael. The usual."

"Is that all right? He's having scotch and soda."

"That's fine, I guess."

"Coming up," I told him.

"It's great to have a regular place where you can come to have the usual," Jack said. "You have to establish regularities in life or the whole thing just flies apart."

"The whole thing?"

"Life. Living. Here's the booze."

"Two scotch and soda." I set the drinks down.

"It's on me," Jack said. "Consider it an investment in regularity."

"Sounds like you use the damn stuff as a laxative," I said.

"I'll get the next one," the guy said.

"Cheers. So—to get back to the subject. Do you go to anyplace regular?"

"Not really. Not any more."

"Oh, okay. Deep dark secret. None of my business."

"Not really. Well—something like that, I guess."

"No matter. Everybody has one. You can tell me or not. Why *would* you tell me, anyway? By the way, I'm Jack Tull."

"Ed Pattison."

"Ed, good to know you. Listen, Ed, what I was getting at before

is this: when you're in a place like this, and you know every cobweb that hasn't been swept out of the corners in years, and every bulb that's been burnt out over your head and not replaced, then you've got a place to come to. And when you can sit in that place and hear the rain outside, it's like the first caveman in the first rainstorm who checked into a cave and found out it was dry in there."

"Like the first caveman."

"Do you think that's stupid? You think that's stupid."

"No—"

"Don't sweat it, you're not the first person to think that's stupid. Everybody does. Sometimes I do myself. That's because—apologies to Michael, but it's true—this place is kind of a hole in the wall. But that's what makes it a cave. It's like, in a nice place they have sound systems and crowds of people trying to figure out if they look stupid or great on the dance floor—it's a mighty fine line—and trying to figure out who has AIDS and who doesn't, and you can't hear the rain."

The smile was gone, and it hadn't been replaced with anything. Jack often strikes new guys this way.

"Is he bothering you?" I asked Ed.

"Me? No, I'm fine."

"Just let me know if he starts bothering you."

"Thanks, but I'm fine."

I walked away, but not too far.

"Don't let Michael bother you," said Jack. "He thinks he has me all figured out, but no one does. Michael and I went to school together. Do you know that I saved his life? And now he hopes to return the favor one day."

"Were you in the war together?"

"We've been through the wars together, isn't that right, Michael?"

I nodded at him and stayed where I was.

"How did you save his life?" Ed was looking at Jack as if searching for bullet holes, or where he'd landed on a grenade.

"I married the only woman he ever considered marrying. He wouldn't have survived it."

"That's how you saved his life?"

"Do you hear that sound?"

"What sound?"

"Listen."

"I don't hear anything."

Neither did I. But if I thought about it, I could imagine the soft hiss of rain, a tape-recording of rain.

"Of course you don't. Are you married?"

"Kind of. Not really."

"Oh. The deep, dark secret." Ed didn't say anything. "Splitsville?"

"It looks that way."

"So now you're out for a change of scenery. Something new."

"Right."

"Mistake."

"Why?"

"Is this what you want to do? Could you do this all the time?"

Jack was in the fourteenth year of a particularly nasty marriage, and when I thought about it enough it worried me. He'd been near the edge a long time for a man who liked his peace.

His wife, who we both had known since high school, was a good-sized butterfly, always winging off to somewhere else, and if Jack wasn't interested in winging with her it didn't seem to disturb her very much. She just found someone else to wing with. The old story.

In fourteen years they had both gained weight, but it was a little weight, which is usually a good sign, and not a lot of weight, which is almost always a bad sign. They looked most of the time like they'd just pushed away from the table. Satisfied.

"She always wanted out, from like the third week on," is how he tells it. "Naturally, I wasn't too happy about it, and so I'm always asking her what I can do. She told me to cut back on football on the tube. Then it was too much beer. Then it was Saturday and Sunday afternoons with the boys. Every time, I said all right. She said not enough. She wanted to travel anytime, anywhere. No routine. Get up and go. Surprises. There was always another surprise. She wanted to live like a James Bond movie. I had to draw the line somewhere. I have my self-respect, right? I told her no dice. She moved out."

Jack started coming to the bar every night on his way home from work, at first to talk to me about things, then just to talk, then finally just to sit and listen to what amounted to nothing—it was just the sound of refuge. He stayed for an hour any night he was here—weekdays, weekends—and the other regulars gradually came to realize that he usually wanted to be quiet. I'm not even sure exactly how he made that clear. But the regulars kept quiet, and new people seemed to catch on soon enough.

After an hour, his wife would pull up to the curb in her big dark

sedan. Through the open doorway, we could see the passenger door swing open and her slide back behind the wheel. She was a big, good-looking woman. Jack would see her, too, and he would say his quiet goodbyes and be gone. If he took too long, she'd holler for him to move.

"I adjusted to living alone," he now told Ed, like he told all the new guys.

Ed was young, probably fifteen years younger than Jack. With a first marriage gone bad, he and his wife were probably married before they were out of their teens.

"I began to like it," Jack went on. "I never thought I'd be capable of living alone, but I liked it. Naturally, she moved back. Couldn't stand it without me. She was happy, she said, staying in. I figured she was just lonely, but I let her come back, anyway. I still came out for the hour here at Michael's, of course. We looked for a house, I slapped down the deposit, got all the furniture set, and she was gone again. The wanderlust."

I moved out of earshot. I knew what Jack would tell Ed now. It was the same thing every time. Jack would come and sit in the corner enjoying the peace, until he found some new guy with bad marriage written all over his face. Then Jack would move in and tell him how he'd solved his problem. He would tell how he'd lost control one night, went to his wife's place, incited an argument, and socked her with everything he had. It had been enough.

He would tell him how he'd called me, his old high-school buddy, and I had closed up early and gone over and helped him get rid of the body. If the guy was interested enough, Jack could get very detailed. I learned to ignore them while the tale was being told.

Tonight the new guy stood up and looked around the bar.

"Do you all know the story this man is telling me right now?" he asked.

There was a general, rumbled consensus.

"Do *you*?" He was looking at me.

I said that I did.

"Well, isn't anybody going to call the cops?"

Just then there was a crunch of tires at the curb outside the bar.

Jack excused himself quietly and left, climbing in past the open passenger door of the black sedan. His wife spun grit onto the sidewalk pulling out.

The new guy stared after the car hungrily. "Who was that?"

"That was Mrs. Tull," I said.

"Mrs. Tull?"

The very same, I told him, and nodded.

"So I guess there's no reason to call the cops, then, right?"

Right, I said, and bought him a fresh scotch and soda because he was a good sport. If he wanted, I was even resigned to listen to *his* story.

But as I stood there, small-talking with him, I couldn't shake this sinking feeling I had that one day that's exactly what Jack would make me do: call the cops. I wasn't looking forward to it. After all, he was a high-school buddy and most of what he'd said about his wife was the truth. There was a sense in which he certainly had saved my life, or at least salvaged it, when he married her before I did. He had chosen the edge, and left me to negotiate a fatter strip of territory.

But one night, I knew, Jack would come in for the usual, and at eight-thirty that night there *wouldn't* be a black sedan waiting at the curb. Jack would have to call a cab. And later that night there would be a call to me at the bar just before closing time, and it would be Jack telling me that something highly unusual had happened.

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a **NEW** short story by

TERRY MULLINS

When the police came, there was a lot of confusion and Rosso was asked more questions than he could answer. He tried to describe the killer for them, but they didn't find his description helpful. After he had said for the fifth time that the man was a tall Caucasian with dark glasses and a red beard, the officers gave up on him.

One of Terry Mullins' deceptively quiet cop stories, this one about eighteen-year-old camera-shop clerk Rosso Pallone, who aspires to police work . . .

L A T E D E V E L O P M E N T S

by **TERRY MULLINS**

When he was eighteen, Rosso Pallone graduated from parochial high school without distinction and started looking for a job. Neither his parents nor his teachers suggested that he consider going to college. He had hoped someone would. He had even sat beside the Villanova scout who looked over the high-school basketball players. He asked the scout what Villanova was like, but basketball scouts don't encourage short Italian kids from South Philly so Rosso got a job in a camera shop, lived at home, and saved his money.

He was alone in the shop one hot summer afternoon when Albert Brudzew was killed. Brudzew came in as Rosso's boss was leaving for lunch. He waited until the boss had left and then placed two rolls of film on the counter. As Rosso was writing up the order, Brudzew asked if his earlier film had come in. Rosso continued to write and said he would look it up. When he'd finished with the new film, he dug through the file of returned prints and found four packs. Brud-

© 1989 by Terry Mullins.

zew paid for them but said there should have been six—he had turned them all in at the same time. As Rosso was going through the returned prints again, a large man with a red beard and dark glasses entered the store, drew a pistol, and shot Brudzew three times. Rosso dropped flat behind the counter, hitting the alarm button as he did. He heard the man walk over to Brudzew and he heard the rustle of paper. Then the man left quickly.

When the police came, there was a lot of confusion and Rosso was asked more questions than he could answer. He tried to describe the killer for them, but they didn't find his description very helpful. After he had said for the fifth time that the man was a tall Caucasian with dark glasses and a red beard, the officers gave up on him. At some time in the confusion, a detective had arrived. He talked with the officers, looked over their reports, gave some orders, and pretty much ignored Rosso until the body had been removed and the officers had left. By then the owner of the camera shop had arrived. The detective, who said his name was Vance Furr, asked if he could talk with Rosso. They went into the office in the rear of the store.

He started slowly, having Rosso tell everything he could remember from the time Albert Brudzew came into the shop. He wanted the rolls of film Brudzew had brought in. He said they would develop and print them in the police lab—they could be important: "You see, Rosso, whoever the red-bearded man was, he took the four packs of finished pictures you gave Brudzew. That suggests that Brudzew's pictures were important. I want you to watch for the two rolls that hadn't come in. When they're returned, let me know right away. But don't say anything to anyone about it."

"Yes, sir."

"You said the man was tall. How tall?"

"Just tall—big and tall."

"Was he as tall as Brudzew?"

Rosso thought carefully. "No," he said, "almost, but he was a little shorter."

"Okay. Don't mention that to anyone, either. What kind of a gun did he use, an automatic or a revolver?"

"I'm sorry, I didn't see it that well. I didn't know he had a gun until he started shooting, then I dropped flat."

"Did he have the gun in his hand when he came in?"

"No."

"Then you must have seen him draw it."

"Yes—he reached inside his jacket and pulled it out real quick and started shooting."

"What kind of jacket?"

"One of those light summer suit jackets—light brown. It matched his pants."

"And his shoes?"

"They were brown, solid brown, with tan socks."

"Was he wearing a tie?"

"No, an open-collar shirt, a yellow shirt."

"What color hair?"

"I couldn't see. He wore a brown hat, like a Panama hat."

"You saw more than you thought you did, Rosso. Did either of them say anything?"

"No. I don't think Brudzew even saw him. He was watching me go through the photo file. Why don't you want me to tell anyone how tall the man was?"

"Because you witnessed a murder. The description you gave to the police at first that the reporter took down was vague—a tall man with dark glasses and a red beard. If the killer thinks that's all you saw, he'll feel safe, and you'll be safe. But if he finds out that you really saw a lot more, he may not feel safe and you may not be safe."

So when Rosso got home, he just spoke about the tall man and the crowds who gathered around the camera shop until the police left. His mother burst out crying and said that he could have been killed. His father cursed the city for not protecting its citizens from criminals. And his two younger sisters said that he was a hero, presumably for not getting shot. Supper was long and animated, and though Rosso didn't say much the conversation began and ended with his adventure.

Brudzew's other two sets of prints arrived on Monday. Rosso found them first and put them aside. Then he called Vance Furr.

The detective came over at once. He asked if Rosso would come to headquarters during lunch. Rosso agreed eagerly. He had looked at the pictures.

He and Detective Furr ate hoagies in Furr's office while Furr went over the pictures. They were shots of two different groups of men on fishing trips. Brudzew was only in two pictures. The other forty-six showed one group of eight men boarding a fishing boat, catching different kinds of fish, and breaking up to go home, and another group of six men doing much the same thing.

"Brudzew was in this first group of eight," said Furr. "The question is why he took pictures of the second group."

"I think I know," said Rosso. "In three of the pictures there's a man I know—Renzo Cari. I know two others in that group, too, but the point is that Renzo Cari is supposed to be dead."

"I remember. He was out on the West Coast. There was a private-plane crash and an unidentifiable body was supposed to be his. How come you knew him? He's a member of the mob."

"He lived two blocks from us. My parents know his wife Pomona. She's been trying to collect his insurance."

"What about the two others you know?"

"Giovan Crespino is in almost every picture and Piero Bene is in a lot of them."

"They're members of the mob, too, aren't they?"

"Well, they all work for Mike Agnolo. The newspapers say he's a mobster, but my folks seem to think he's a nice guy. You can't always believe the papers."

"Which of the men do your folks know best?"

"Cari and Agnolo are in our parish and Papa talks about them a lot. They're big shots in our neighborhood. We don't really know the others. There's one more thing about the pictures. The ones of Brudzew's party are a lot clearer than the others. I think the ones of the second group might have been taken with a telephoto lens."

"Good point. That would fit right in. I guess it's about time for you to get back to work, Rosso. You've been a big help. You ought to try out for the Police Academy."

Rosso slowed down his preparation for leaving. This was the first time anyone had ever said he should go to any kind of school. He gave Furr time to say something more, but the detective just stacked the pictures. Rosso said, "I'm too short for the Police Academy."

Furr seemed surprised that they were still talking about it. "No, you aren't," he said. "What are you—about five feet eight?"

"Yes."

"That's not short. I'm only five feet nine." He went to a file with the photographs and Rosso left.

But Furr called the next day and asked Rosso to come to his office again. He had enlargements of two of the pictures. One was the best shot of Renzo Cari. There was no doubt about it being him. The other was a man Rosso didn't know. "Could this be the man who shot Brudzew?" Furr asked him.

"I can't tell," Rosso replied.

Furr handed him a dark-brown art pencil and a brick-red one. "Draw dark glasses and a red beard on him," he said.

Rosso did. "It could be the man. I'm not sure, but it could be."

Furr nodded. "It probably is, then. He's Aretemo, the hit man for the mob. Stay away from him, he's dangerous. You say your folks know Agnolo, Cari, Crespino, and Bene?"

"Not as friends, but Agnolo and Cari are more or less neighbors and we see a lot of them. The other two show up in the neighborhood from time to time."

"If you hear anyone talking about Cari, listen carefully but don't let anyone know it. Just listen." Furr sounded serious.

From then on, Rosso stayed at the dinner table as long as anyone was talking. When one of his sisters commented on this new habit, he said that summer television was all reruns. He found the conversation boring, however. The family didn't seem to know anything that the rest of the neighborhood didn't. It was Thursday before anyone mentioned Cari. Then his mother said that Mrs. Cari had asked her about the murder in Rosso's store and they had spent a lot of time talking about it. So Rosso was prepared when Mrs. Cari visited them after supper and wanted him to tell her all about the murder.

Mrs. Cari was one of the most smartly dressed women in the neighborhood. She was about forty-five, and Rosso's parents often said that she must have been beautiful when she was young. Rosso doubted this. He tried to imagine her without the spectacular clothes and jewelry, with her hair done by the local hairdresser and driving a second-hand Buick instead of a new Audi, and the result wasn't beautiful.

On the other hand, it might have been more comfortable. The well groomed woman who was quizzing him now made him uneasy. He tried to remember how he had answered the police and reporters just after it happened. A tall man with dark glasses and a red beard. That was the key. Don't think about anything else. And forget the late pictures. He was busy writing up the order. He hadn't seen much.

Mrs. Cari, however, seized on that. "He didn't just pick up four packs of prints, then? He brought some in?"

"Yes, he brought in two rolls to be developed. The police took them and said they'd develop them in their lab."

"And did they?"

"They took them. I suppose they printed them." He had to keep reminding himself that he wasn't supposed to know that there was any connection between Brudzew and Cari. He had to think of Mrs. Cari as just another of Mama's nosy friends pestering him with pointless questions. It was a relief when she shifted from her naturally sharp questioning voice to her party voice and said she found his story thrilling but now she had to go.

When Detective Furr called on Friday, Rosso said he didn't think he should be hanging around headquarters any more. Furr agreed. Rosso told him about Mrs. Cari's visit.

"Now I *know* you'd better stay away from here," Furr said. "I called because I'd developed and printed those rolls of film and had copies lying on my desk. They were unimportant—just pictures of Brudzew and four different women on the beach—but they aren't here now. I don't know if they disappeared during the night or this morning—I've been busy—but someone took them."

As it turned out, the camera shop wasn't much safer than police headquarters. Friday night someone broke into the store and spilled packets of photographs all over the place. It was a mess—Rosso spent Saturday morning sorting the pictures out and putting them in new bags. Fortunately, the burglar didn't dump the pictures—he just tore the packets open to see what sort of pictures were there and then threw them aside. Nothing seemed to be missing.

Furr came over and examined the place. When they were alone in the back office, Rosso produced a half dozen packs of prints. "It's hard to open these with gloves on," he said. "And no matter how careful you are, it's hard not to leave fingerprints on photographs. These six packages of photographs all have fingerprints on them. Can you copy them without hurting the pictures?"

Yes, Furr could. "I'll make a point of getting these back to you this afternoon," he said. "Thanks, Rosso."

That afternoon when he brought the pictures back, Furr said, "This complicates things. I assumed that Cari's friends had burgled your place, but the fingerprints are of Brudzew's two brothers, Josef and Jan—two small-time hoods. The pictures accompanying their records looked familiar. They were two of those with Brudzew on the fishing trip. If they show up here asking for his pictures, let me know."

"Don't worry. If *anyone* shows up asking for those pictures I'll let you know." Rosso hoped the detective would repeat his comment that he should apply for the Police Academy, but Furr seemed to accept Rosso's assistance as a matter of fact now. Rosso knew he couldn't simply decide to leave his job and apply, but the thought was never far from his mind. There had to be some word or a sign. Since words didn't seem easy to come by, he decided to force a sign. He would ask for a raise. If he didn't get the raise, he'd quit and seek admission to the Police Academy.

The next morning after the routine opening was finished, he proposed a raise. The owner talked it over with him and not only agreed to a raise but said they would call it a promotion—Rosso would be assistant manager.

When he told his parents about the raise and the promotion, his mother was proud and his father was astonished. Rosso steered between the two attitudes.

"Being assistant manager sounds like more than it is," he pointed out. "I'll be doing what I've always been doing. And there are only four of us working there and two of them work part-time and go to Community College part-time. So the raise means more than the title."

His parents might never have heard a word.

It rained on Sunday, and that afternoon Rosso drove his sisters to church to attend a cousin's wedding. He let them out as close to the door as he could and then joined a long line of cars double-parked. He had a book to read while waiting for them to signal they were ready to go home, but for now he just sat and watched the guests arrive.

Mrs. Cari's car drove up and she got out. Usually she drove herself, but the heavy rain must have caused her not to. Rosso looked to see who was driving for her. It was the man who shot Brudzew.

Rosso averted his eyes quickly and sat very still, hoping the man couldn't see him. Mrs. Cari went into the church and her car drove off. Rosso found himself trembling. He opened the book and pretended to read.

Naturally, his sisters were among the last to leave the church. Mrs. Cari had been one of the first, but she was still looking for her car. As Rosso's sisters jumped into the back seat, Mrs. Cari opened the front door and said, "Could I hitch a ride? My chauffeur seems to be lost and I don't want to wait here all day."

Of course Rosso said yes. She sat and talked about the wedding all the way home. There, her car was nowhere to be seen, and she looked worried as she entered her house.

Rosso dropped his sisters off and drove to a public telephone in another part of town. He called police headquarters, but Detective Furr was off duty. He called the home number and Furr answered. "I've just seen the man who shot Brudzew," Rosso told him. "He drove Mrs. Cari to a wedding today but he didn't come back for her. I had to drive her home."

"You're sure he's the killer?"

"Not completely, but I know he's the man you call Aretemo—the one in the picture I drew glasses and a beard on. He and her car are both gone and she didn't seem happy about it."

"Okay. I know the car. I'll have— No, I'd better not. If we pick it up before she calls us, she'll know you were in touch with the police. Thanks, Ross. I can start a few things in motion, and be ready in case she calls."

The eleven o'clock news on Channel 10 covered the story of a stolen car found on a side road in Bucks County. The car was Mrs. Cari's. They also showed a body being carried to an ambulance in a plastic bag. An unidentified man had been found shot in the back of the head ten yards from the stolen car. Police were investigating.

Monday Mrs. Cari drove her car to early Mass. Rosso's sisters waved at her but she didn't see them. After Mass she was in serious conversation with Mr. and Mrs. Agnolo, so Rosso's family didn't try to speak with her. Rosso looked at the car carefully. It didn't seem damaged.

When he got home from work that day, his mother stopped him at the door and said, "Mrs. Cari called and said she left her cigarette lighter in your car yesterday and would you bring it over. She'd come herself but Mr. Agnolo and some friends are at her place."

"Sure, right away," Rosso said. He went out and looked in the passenger seat of his car. There was the lighter, a lipstick, and a small bottle of perfume. He put them all in his pocket and walked to Mrs. Cari's house. As he walked up the steps to ring the doorbell, he noticed there were two cars parked across the street with men sitting in them reading newspapers. Thinking they might be police, Rosso said nothing when Crespino answered the door and told him Mrs. Cari was in the kitchen. He found her liquifying carrots in a blender. She thanked him and said she hadn't even missed the lip-

stick and perfume. As Rosso let himself out, he looked closer at the men in the car and recognized three of them as members of Brudzew's fishing party.

At the corner pizzeria, he stopped to use the public telephone to call Mrs. Cari. While at the phone, he could see her house. The two cars were still there.

Crespino answered the phone and Rosso said, "I think Mr. Agnolo should know that there are men in two cars across the street watching Mrs. Cari's house. Tell him, will you?"

"Sure."

When Rosso hung up, he decided to squander another quarter. He called Detective Furr. Waiting to be put through, he saw four men get out of the cars and walk across the street. When Furr answered, Rosso said, "Three of the men in the Brudzew pictures have been watching Mrs. Cari's house. They've just crossed the street and—no! Crespino opened the door and they shot him! Two of them are firing through the front window. Get some cars over here!"

Crespino lay dead on the steps. Inside, in the living room, Mrs. Cari was holding a dishrag to Agnolo's chest. The sofa was still smoldering with a dozen bullet holes, but Agnolo seemed the only person hit. Bene was there. Fishing keys out of Agnolo's pocket, he tossed them to Rosso. "Get his car started," he said. "I called Jefferson. They'll have Doc Wilson ready."

"Shouldn't we call an ambulance?"

"You want him to bleed to death?"

Bene and Mrs. Cari helped Agnolo up and Rosso kicked the doors open. Then he opened the car doors and got in front and started the motor. He had never driven a large, powerful car before and wasn't used to automatic transmission. He pressed the accelerator and the motor sounded like a transcontinental jet. He took his foot off the accelerator. Once Bene and Mrs. Cari were in back with Agnolo, he gingerly shifted into drive, holding his foot firmly on the brake. As the back door shut, he eased his foot off the brake. The car leaped forward like a greyhound out of the gate.

The doctor and an emergency crew were waiting with oxygen and intravenous equipment, but after a quick look at Agnolo the doctor waved them away and just put Agnolo on a stretcher and ordered him wheeled in. As the stretcher passed Rosso, Agnolo reached out and grabbed his arm. "Your call saved my life," he said. "Agnolo

does not forget." He disappeared into the hospital, followed by Mrs. Cari and Bene.

Ten minutes later, Bene came out looking a bit less worried. "He got hit twice," he said, "but one was a flesh wound and the other missed his lung. He's going to be all right."

"Good," said Rosso. "Shall I wait for Mrs. Cari and drive us back?"

Bene looked wary. "No. No. I'll take the keys and park the boss's car. Pomona and I will stay until he says we should go. Thanks." And he got into the car and drove it slowly and sedately into the hospital parking lot.

Rosso walked back over the route he had so recently and frantically come. When he reached the Cari house, he saw police cars.

There was no sign of Crespino's body. Detective Furr met him and asked if he had witnessed the shooting. Rosso said, "Yes, sir. I was in the pizzeria on the corner."

Furr said, "Please come in and describe what happened."

They went into the Cari living room and sat down, avoiding the blood-soaked, bullet-riddled sofa. Furr said, "Crespino was dead. We found Renzo Cari hiding in a third-floor bedroom. He's wanted for embezzling and tried to disappear. Thanks to your call, we also caught the killers. They abandoned their cars at Vet Stadium, but we had them bottled in and they gave up without a fight. I hear you drove Agnolo to the hospital."

Rosso smiled away some of the tension. "He apparently wasn't badly hurt. What's this all about?"

"I think we have most of it figured out now. Renzo Cari was laundering money for the mob, using a small New Jersey bank in which he had bought controlling interest. He also embezzled five million dollars from the bank. Federal agents found out and were after him. So he went to the West Coast, and when there was a plane accident everyone tried to pretend he'd been killed. Actually, he came back here in disguise and has been living at home and keeping out of sight. From time to time he'd go fishing with his friends. It seemed safe enough.

"But Brudzew saw him and photographed him and then demanded money from Mrs. Cari. Aretemo shot Brudzew and stole the photographs he was holding as evidence that Cari was alive. I don't know if we can prove that Agnolo or the Caris ordered him to do it or paid him to do it. We'll try, but Cari is saying Aretemo acted on his own. It's Brudzew's brothers who killed Aretemo and tried to

wipe out Agnolo and his friends. You were a great help, Ross. We probably would never have caught them if you hadn't called me when you did. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Yes, Mr. Furr," said Rosso, "there is one thing."



DETECTIVERSE

OVERACHIEVER

by ELIZABETH L. HAWN

Of the boys on the block, only Willie did right.
He never stole hubcaps, never stayed out all night.
He studied long hours, got in a good college,
Then to make money with some of his knowledge
He went into Wall Street, where he was a success,
Bought a Jaguar, a condo, all the things that impress.

The pride of the neighborhood, joy of his mother
(Though a thorn in the flesh to his ne'er-do-well brother),
An example to youth, who were told Willie's story—
Who could have predicted an end to his glory?
But Willie's in trouble, his glitter is fading—
He's going to prison for insider trading.

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DEPARTMENT OF FIRST STORIES

Magic Hours was one of the most desirable and valuable books published by the Derrydale Press, even though it had only thirty-two pages. Each copy of this limited edition was numbered, and some had been autographed by the author.

As it happens, James Castle (of Oklahoma) owns a bookstore and has a book-locating service. He is also a professional chef. Perhaps he'll find food for a story in that other specialty someday soon . . .

CONDITION OF SALE

by JAMES CASTLE

In my business, book locating, I often receive some unusual requests for books that are out-of-print. For instance, I have one customer, a corporate lawyer, who wants any Gerald McBoing Boing books I can find. Gerald McBoing Boing books really don't have any significant market value other than what this particular customer is willing to pay, and most of the children's books I locate for him are at best in fair condition. He's willing to pay well for them, though, and naturally I'm willing to locate all the copies I can.

For the past year, I've been working almost exclusively for one customer. He's determined to purchase all one hundred copies of *Magic Hours* by Eugene V. Connett. The tome is one of the most desirable and valuable books published by the Derrydale Press, even though it has only thirty-two pages. Each copy of this limited edition is numbered, and some have been autographed by the author. The last copy I purchased for my customer, whose name I must keep strictly confidential, was sold to me for \$13,000. In turn I sold the book to my customer for \$20,000. This is the fourth copy of *Magic Hours* I've sold to him, each one for \$20,000, even though I bought the other copies at an even lower price. So far, I've made a total profit of over \$35,000 in the short span of eleven months.

© 1989 by James Castle.

However, there's a specific reason why my customer is more than willing to pay such an inflated price for this particular book. My customer's condition of sale requires that I give him as many details as are available about the individual I purchased the book from. He has explained to me that he is looking for a murderer. It seems that his wife surprised a book thief in the act of stealing their copy of *Magic Hours* from their home library, and the thief hit her over the head with a bookend, killing her instantly, before making good his escape. He won't tell me which numbered copy he wants, probably because he's afraid I might make a deal with the murderer.

Each time my customer receives a copy of *Magic Hours* from me, and the information about the person I purchased it from, he has his personal security personnel do a thorough investigation of the source. He is determined to find his wife's killer no matter how many of his many millions he has to spend.

Of course, the copy of *Magic Hours* that was stolen from my customer was numbered, but he feels that the murderer could find a way to alter the number.

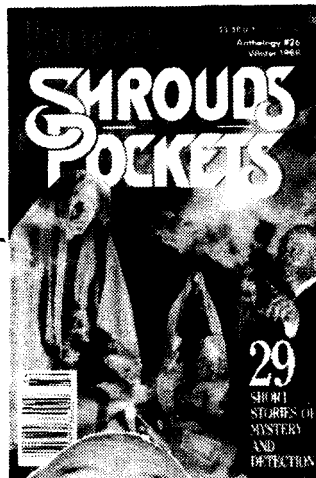
I'm confident that my income from this one customer will continue to help make my financial life secure, at least until he dies of old age, or until he finds the murderer. However, finding the murderer is going to be impossible for him. I mean, it would be crazy to sell him my copy of *Magic Hours*—which is the copy he's looking for.



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DEPARTMENT OF SECOND STORIES

James had stayed out two nights. Maybe he was at the hospital. Maybe he'd been filling in for another nurse. He had a lot of responsibility. There were eleven patients on the cancer ward and he had to be sure they got the correct medication . . .

THE MAN OF THE HOUSE

by LEA CASH-DOMINGO

She squeezes pink detergent into the sink and turns on the hot water. The sauce from the dinner two nights ago hardened on the plates and she has to scrub them extra hard. She shouldn't have to do the dishes, she thinks. If James had come home last night and the night before, she wouldn't be washing them. She rinses them clean one at a time and stacks them in the Rubbermaid holder.

He's never stayed out two whole nights before. Usually he comes in at half past six, brings her flowers from the garden, and helps her with dinner. Before bed he gives her a footrub.

Her feet ache. They feel swollen. She looks down at them. They are red and puffy. Why hasn't he come? He knows what it's like to have aching feet. He works in a hospital. He stands on his feet all day.

She grabs the long-stem wine glasses and submerges them in the soapy water. Something sharp hurts her hand. Blood rises to the surface of the water. She jerks her hand from the water. The blood runs down her wrist like paint.

They were painting the outside of the house a bright red. She looked at James as he confidently slapped paint onto the boards. At fourteen he was a handsome boy, better-looking than his father. He had her looks.

He turned his head and grinned at her. "Say, Mom, why don't you

© 1989 by Lea Cash-Domingo.

make something cold to drink? It's getting hot." He wiped perspiration from his forehead with the back of his sleeve.

She went inside and came out with an iced tea. "Here you are, my sweet."

He drained the glass in a few seconds. "I needed that," he said, handing the empty glass back to her.

She wiped beads of perspiration from his face with her apron. "Don't stay out too long."

He's stayed out two nights. Her feet ache. Maybe he's at the hospital. Maybe he's filling in for another nurse. He has a lot of responsibility. There are eleven patients on the cancer ward and he has to make sure they get the correct medication. He's fond of them. He's told her about old Mr. Richardson, who is in his eighties, and Mrs. Thaxton, who's not so old. Fifty-two. A year older than she is. Too young to have cancer.

She's glad James has found a place for himself. She used to think when he was younger that he wouldn't be able to keep a job because of his headaches. The headaches kept him home from junior high school. But he no longer has them, they're part of the past. It's important for people to have a place, she thinks. Her place is with him, her son.

She unwraps the towel. Her hand has stopped bleeding. She makes a fist, and the wound opens like the mouth of a fish.

"Darling, do you have to cut it open like that?"

James laughed. "You want to eat it, don't you? It's too late to throw it back in the river. Besides, you don't want to eat the guts, do you?"

He was laughing at her as he ripped the knife through the underbelly of the mackerel. Then he reached inside and took out the guts. Red and blue things crowded onto the cutting board.

She watched, partly in admiration, partly with terror, as his fingers searched the inner belly. He had grown up so fast. He had become the man of the house at fifteen.

She glanced then at her husband Andrew, who lay asleep in the boat with his hat covering his face. He held the beer bottle close to his breast.

"Catch!" James yelled.

She turned. The fish's head, severed, flew through the air and landed at her feet . . .

She returns to the sink and scrubs the pot. What if he's not coming home? She pauses in her task. What if he's not at the hospital? Perhaps she should call to find out. But if he is there, he'll get angry with her for checking up on him.

For ten years it's been the two of them—her and James. He's been a good son, taking care of her without her even asking. What will happen if he doesn't come home? He's a grown boy, she tells herself, he's all of twenty-seven.

She dries her hands and moves into the living room. On the bookshelf are pictures of the past. She picks up the one of Andrew.

They had fought for as long as she could recall. About everything. The children, the bills, the schools, the church, doctors, his job. She hated the fighting. Any little thing set him off. Complaining was a way of life for him. She felt she had to be both parents to make up for his wrath. If the boat hadn't capsized, Andrew would still be complaining.

She puts the photograph down. Poor James. He has so much guilt about that day he won't talk about it. She doesn't blame him. Nobody but a fool would have taken a seventeen-year-old out that day, with the wind up to thirty miles an hour and no visibility. It's a wonder James didn't drown, too.

There's dust on the frames. She unties her apron, bunches it into a ball, and uses it to wipe the pictures free of dust. James looks so handsome in his cowboy outfit.

The front door opens, and James comes inside and kisses her on the cheek.

He gives her an amused smile, one she isn't certain how to interpret. She smiles, too, and asks him about the cancer ward.

Old Mrs. Thaxton died, he tells her.

What do you mean? she asks him. She wasn't old. Only fifty-two. She thinks how in a year she will be that old, too. Did Mrs. Thaxton die in her sleep? she asks. Was there pain? Did she see her family before she died?

So many questions, James answers, ruffling her wavy brown hair. Of course she died in her sleep—how else does an old diseased woman die?

Was she in pain? she persists.

He gives her that odd smile. They're all in pain, he says. He goes to the kitchen, opens a can of soup, and pours it into the pan she has washed. She watches in silence as he waits for the soup to boil. He takes the pan off the stove and pours the soup into a cup. What

do you mean they're all in pain? she asks. He answers, simply: life is short, and then we die.

She can't tell if he's playing with her. He must be. Death is certainly nothing to joke about.

You don't mean that, she says.

You don't want to believe what's right in front of your face, he says—so true to form, Mother.

What is right in front of my face? she asks. He counters with a shrug. She tells him she only wanted to know if Mrs. Thaxton was in pain. She doesn't want to die that way. He promises she won't—she doesn't have cancer.

She retreats to the laundry room and takes his pants and socks out of the dryer and carries them to his room. She doesn't like the sound of his voice. He's in a strange mood. She opens his bureau drawer and sees the red scarf at the back of the drawer. She removes it and finds a picture of a young woman—a pretty thing with soft curls and a demure smile. She's surprised and hurt. He hasn't mentioned an interest in a girl.

She pushes the laundry into the drawer and sits on the edge of his bed with the red scarf and the photograph. She begins to feel angry. Why hasn't he told her about the girl?

Her anger grows. They have a pact. He has no right not to tell her. They're a team. She's always been there when he's needed her.

"Mom, come quick!" James was shrieking. "Come quick!"

She ran from the back yard up the porch stairs into the house. It was dark inside. Where was the baby? She couldn't hear the baby. She ran into the living room.

The bookcase had toppled onto the playpen. She stared, horrified, unable to move. James was crying. The baby—she couldn't bear to look.

Andrew came in behind her, his breath smelling of beer. He took a look at James, strode across the room, and slapped him. "How in hell did you let this happen, boy?"

What did he expect of a thirteen-year-old boy?

She goes back to the kitchen, where he is finishing his soup in silence. She wants to ask him about the picture, but she also wants him to tell her about the girl without her having to ask. Do you have something to tell me? she says. No, he answers. If it's important, why won't he tell her? Perhaps he guesses she'll put up a fight

or try to prevent him from leaving. Yes, she thinks, he wants to leave. Perhaps he has no intention of telling her.

Mother, do you remember the day we went to the river after we looked at the capitol? he asks. Of course she remembers. He has asked the question so often that she smiles, comforted by the ritual memory they share.

It was a sunny day. He was nine, and she thirty-three. Just the two of them. They drove to the state capitol and wandered in and out of chambers. Then, after a lunch of hot dogs at a stand, they went to the river. It was a quiet river, like those you see in pictures.

She sat on a blanket on the grass, and he lay with his head in her lap. She made a whistle out of a blade of grass and ran it over his forehead.

"It tickles," he'd laughed. He took the blade from her and moved it across her neck. It tickled her, but she didn't say so. The tickle was a young feeling, which caused her to feel desirable, as she had when she first met Andrew.

"Isn't this nice?" she asked.

He looked lovingly into her eyes. "I'll protect you from Dad." It was a sweet thing to say, and she smiled. "I won't let him touch you again."

"He doesn't mean to hurt me," she'd told him. "It's the drink. Sometimes he doesn't even remember."

"I won't let him do that ever again." He passed the blade of grass across her stomach and she wondered how he knew about the welt that had come from the beating.

"Want to hear something nice?" she asked.

"Yes," he said.

"I'm going to have a baby."

He jumped up suddenly and ran toward the river, arms wide.

She remembers wishing she hadn't told him about the baby.

Wasn't that a great day? he asks. It was one of the happiest days of my life. I could've stayed there forever.

Would you like to go back there? she asks.

I did the other day, he says, but it wasn't the same. It was spoiled.

What wasn't the same? she asks. He must be telling her he's leaving. Did you lie on the grass with her. Not a question, a statement. She can't manage to keep the harshness from her tone. She shows him the red scarf and throws the picture at him.

He puts the cup on the table forcefully and shouts. Not words. Sounds. He shouts sounds, and she sees anger in his eyes and becomes frightened. He sounds like a wild animal, something primitive. What has come over him? She closes her eyes and prays. She thinks of images. Bars. She needs bars to keep herself safe from him. Guns. She needs the sound of one to warn him to stop. Uniforms. She thinks of men in blue. Hurry, she tells them. Hurry!

She leaves him and goes to sit on the porch. What in God's name has come over him? What about that day at the river? She can hear him moving inside the house, throwing things and shouting. He sounds tortured. Bars. Guns. Blue uniforms.

A patrol car pulls up to the curb. Thank God, she thinks, relieved that her prayers are answered. Two male officers with sticks on their hips and guns in their holsters come up the walk. She smiles. They don't.

When they come out again, they have James in handcuffs. Why did you tell them I was here? he shouts. He hurls ugly words at the two men and drags his feet as they pull him along to the car. Why do you let them take me? he shouts at her. He refuses to get inside the patrol car and the officers have to bunch up his body to get him into the back seat.

Now he will get help. She goes inside and takes his cup to the sink and washes it. The picture of the girl is on the floor. She picks it up to examine it, then goes to the bedroom, opens the drawer, and puts the red scarf back. It looks like blood among his underwear. She sits on the bed with the picture. It would have been easier if he had told her about the girl himself. Easier for him, easier for her. She wouldn't have had to wish the police on him.

The girl is pretty, and young—about twenty. She was twenty when she married Andrew. All the boys wanted to dance with her at the summer cotillion. When she chose Andrew, her parents and her friends warned her about him. They said he liked to drink. They said he did strange things when he was drunk. But she liked the way he held her to him when they danced and liked to hear him whisper that she was the prettiest thing he'd ever seen.

Someone comes inside. The room darkens. She turns the photograph over and reads her son's inscription. "Rose, who is good and pure."

I'll take that, ma'am, a voice behind her says. She looks up at the stern face of the officer. It's mine, she says. He goes down on one

knee beside her and once again the light streams inside the room. We need it as evidence, he says.

She wishes him away. He stays. She closes her eyes and wishes him gone, but when she opens them he's still there. I called you, she says. I called you with my mind, and I can send you away. He looks at her oddly. She's seen that look before. The officer reaches for the picture and says, Let go.

She lets go, but as she feels the picture being taken away from her she begins to cry. I'm sorry to have to do this, ma'am, the officer says in a gentle voice. It's never easy to tell a mother that her son is wanted on suspicion of murder.

No! She grabs the picture from him, stares at it, and flings it from her as though to purge herself of sin. The sound of rushing water. The tickle of the blade of grass across her neck. Then the air is perfectly quiet. The bookshelf and books have toppled on the playpen. The sailboat is capsized and the police investigators are asking a lot of questions.

What has she done? She sees herself running outside. A man resembling James peers from the window of the patrol car calling her name. She watches herself watching him. Who is he and why does he stare at her that way, as though he wants her to do something? There's nothing she can do. She turns away and walks slowly toward the porch where a man in a blue uniform stands, one hand tentatively resting on his gun.

Have you seen my son? she asks him. His name is James. We had a fight and he left the house angry. If you see him, will you send him home to his mother? She goes inside the house and closes the door.

She hopes James won't stay out too late, but she turns on the porch light just in case.



a **NEW** Rand story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

"Hello there," the man said with a smile as Robby drew closer to where he sat near the water. "I'll bet you're Robby Wilson. I saw your picture in the papers." He spoke with an accent, like those people on Masterpiece Theatre.

"Yeah," Robby answered guardedly. "Are you from TV?"

Rand in America—attending a gathering of retired intelligence officers in Washington, D.C., and about to return to London when he is approached about an assignment here . . .

THE UNDERGROUND SPY

by **EDWARD D. HOCH**

The children came to Camp Rainbow every summer from the city. It was a two-hour bus ride into the wooded foothills of the Appalachians, and by the time the journey was finished boys like Robby Wilson were ready to play. He'd never minded the annual two weeks at camp, even when his folks started sending him off at the age of seven. Now that he was eleven, he felt like one of the veterans. It was his turn to snicker at the first-time campers who sometimes cried all the way up to Rainbow.

There was talk of a baseball game almost from the first minute the counselor assigned them to their cabins. The counselor's name was Dave Jennings and this was his second summer at Rainbow. He was twenty-five years old and he'd told Robby he was studying for a master's degree in business administration. Most of the counselors were college or graduate students, and they worked under grouchy old Mr. Foghorn, as the boys liked to call him.

Robby wasn't interested in sports as much as the others. He liked to escape from the organized games whenever he could and run off

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into the woods with one of the other boys for a private adventure. Sometimes he was just content to sit by the lake and read one of the books he'd brought with him, a practice Mr. Foghorn viewed with alarm. "Your parents didn't send you all the way up here to read," he'd told Robby last summer. "They want you to have fun!"

This day, his first afternoon back at Camp Rainbow, he was especially anxious to do some exploring on his own, to make sure all the secret places were as he remembered them. "Come on down to the lake," he urged Tom Quigley, a friend from prior summers. "You don't care about that stupid ballgame."

"What's at the lake?" Quigley demanded. He was a short, stocky boy who always questioned every suggestion.

"We don't know until we get there. Come on!" They were off and running before Dave Jennings—Uncle Dave, as he liked to be called—noticed they were missing.

Robby led the way down the trail to the water. He liked to think he was exploring a new and uncharted island, ignoring the fact that another cycle of campers would have been there only a few days earlier.

"Look here!" he yelled to Tom, picking up a long sliver of wood half buried in the loose dirt and sand of the manmade beach.

"Ah, it's just a broken baseball bat," the other boy scoffed.

Robby looked around for something else. Here and there a tuft of grass struggled to grow, and he spotted a bit of wire poking out of the dirt at one spot. "Look at this," he said, pulling on it.

The wire kept coming, a foot or more of it, parting the dirt and sand on a line toward the beach. Tom Quigley, interested now, came over to watch. "What is it—fishing line?"

"I don't know. But here's about three feet and it's still coming." The wire stopped abruptly and Robby tugged on it. A few more inches came but that was all. "Help me dig—it's caught on something under the dirt."

They scooped at the loose sand with both hands and Robby pulled on the wire some more. He now had a length of over four feet. Then suddenly the last of the dirt fell away and they were staring into the blackened face of a man. The wire ended in a tight coil around his throat.

Tom Quigley took one look and let out a yell.

Rand had flown over to Washington to take part in a gathering of retired intelligence officers, which included a seminar on "Codes

and Ciphers in an Electronic World." He'd enjoyed his three-day visit and was only sorry that Leila had been too busy with her teaching to accompany him. Now the seminar was finished and the only thing that stood between him and the evening flight to London was the brisk middle-aged man seated in his hotel room. John J. Crowther was the name he'd given, if anything he said could be believed.

"Mr. Rand, you're good," he announced with a disarming smile meant to be both friendly and conspiratorial. "We need you."

"I'm retired," Rand explained at once. "And I've no intention of returning to work."

"This would only be a one-shot thing," Crowther assured him. "We've been in touch with Hastings in London, looking for exactly the right person to assist us. He told me you were not only the right person but you were here in Washington this week. You seem to be a godsend."

"No one's ever called me that before," Rand said drily, "not even my wife."

"We have a little problem here that must be investigated. If we leave it solely in the hands of the local authorities, they may uncover some embarrassing revelations for the press."

"What about your own intelligence services?"

"The F.B.I. handles internal matters. Our C.I.A. is forbidden by law from operating within the country—"

"A law that is sometimes overlooked."

"That's neither here nor there. Can I be frank, Mr. Rand?"

"Certainly."

"Two days ago a man was found dead and buried at a boys' summer camp in the Appalachians. We believe he's been in the ground since late winter or early spring, though the body was reasonably well preserved."

"Have you identified him?"

Crowther nodded. "Scott Kentowski, a former captain in Army intelligence who's been making his living as a mercenary, fighting in Africa and Central America."

"What was he doing in the ground at a boys' camp?"

"That's what we don't know, Mr. Rand. That's what we want you to find out."

"How did he die?"

"Strangled with a wire. Some kids were playing and tugged on an end of the wire that was protruding from the ground. There were

traces of burnt cork still on his face. It looked as if he'd blackened it for a night combat mission."

Rand was getting the picture. "You believe some group has been using the boys' camp in the off-season to train mercenaries."

"The thought crossed my mind." Crowther smiled. "We want to know who's doing it. We can't take a chance on assigning this to some agency that might be deeply involved. The President can't handle another scandal like the Iran-Contra affair."

"Why me?"

"We can trust you to cover up nothing, Mr. Rand. You're a British national. Whatever you find, no matter what the repercussions, you'll report the truth. Hastings told me he'd trust you with the crown jewels."

"Speaking of crown jewels, are you hiring me for this assignment? I can only give you a few days at best. I'm due back in London by the weekend."

"I'm authorized to offer you one thousand dollars a day plus expenses, with an extra bonus for success."

"That seems reasonable," Rand agreed. "But don't expect miracles. Where can you be reached?"

"I'll give you a number. You must understand that your involvement is strictly unofficial. The media would have a field day with our hiring a British national to investigate American citizens."

After Crowther left, Rand put in a call to England, to tell Leila he'd be delayed a few days. Then he read over the information and police reports the man had left for him. It was a strange world, he decided, when the leaders couldn't trust their own intelligence services.

Robby Wilson awakened early on Tuesday. It was three days since he and Tom Quigley had found the man with the wire around his neck. They'd been the camp sensation for a couple of days, and had even been interviewed by a nearby television station, but it was dying down now. He'd assured his mother on the telephone that he was all right, that he wasn't having bad dreams about the body he'd found, and that the camp food was fine. This last was a bit of a lie, but even at age eleven he knew how to tell her what she wanted to hear. He decided to take a secret dip in the lake before breakfast and slipped into his swimming trunks.

As he neared the water, he noticed a man seated alone on a rock not far from the place where he'd found the body. It wasn't one of

the camp regulars—Robby could tell that by the way he was dressed. His suit seemed heavy for summer, and he was actually wearing a tie—at Camp Rainbow!

"Hello there," the man said with a smile as Robby drew closer. "I'll bet you're Robby Wilson. I saw your picture in the paper." He spoke with an accent, like those people on Masterpiece Theatre.

"Yeah," Robby answered guardedly. "Are you from TV?"

The man stood up. "Not exactly. I just came up here to look around. Tell me, who's in charge at your camp?"

"Mr. Foghorn, you mean?"

"Is that his real name?"

"That's what we all call him. It's really Mr. Foggie, but he sounds like a foghorn."

"Where can I find him?"

"That building with the flag in front of it. That's the camp office."

"Thank you, Robby. Oh, one other thing. That man you found in the ground—Mr. Kentowski. Had you ever seen him before? Had he been at the camp in previous summers?"

"No, I don't think so."

The man took a picture from a case he was carrying. "Here's what he really looked like, without all that black on his face."

"No," Robby replied after studying the picture, "I never saw him before."

"Thank you. Go on with your swim now."

Robby ran into the water, calling over his shoulder, "Don't tell Mr. Foggie you saw me here!"

Rand knocked on the screen door and waited until a raspy voice said, "Enter." He found Henry Foggie seated behind a neat and orderly desk, typing notations on an oversized blue file card. He was a grey-haired man with hornrimmed glasses and a small moustache, and was dressed in khaki shorts and a white polo shirt.

Foggie kept typing for a moment, until he realized it wasn't one of the boys waiting to see him. Then he swiveled around to face Rand. "What can I do for you today, sir?"

"I'm looking into the death of Scott Kentowski. I thought perhaps you could be of help. My name is Jeff Rand."

Foggie swatted a fly that had landed on his arm. "If you're a policeman, you're out of your jurisdiction, judging from your British accent."

"I'm not a policeman," Rand assured him. "I'm on a private job,

checking the background of the dead man. Did you ever see him before?" He passed the picture across the desk.

"No, never. The local police already had me look at the body."

"Do you own this camp yourself, Mr. Foggie?"

"Yes. I have a long-term lease on the property."

"Do you use it year-round?"

Henry Foggie met his eyes. "Not really, Mr. Rand. I've been known to do some hunting here in deer season, but the property is closed down the rest of the time unless the owners are using it themselves."

"Do you think Scott Kentowski was a hunter?"

"I suppose so. Maybe a hunter strung the wire to entangle deer and he got caught in it. The hunter returned, found him strangled, and went into a panic. He buried the body rather than report it."

"Do you really think that's what happened?"

"I expect so, Mr. Rand."

"Could you tell me from whom you lease the property?"

"The firm is called *Good Views*. They specialize in remote sites like this. I have their address in Philadelphia if you want it."

"Thank you—I might check further with them."

Rand strolled around Camp Rainbow a while longer, watching as the boys were summoned by whistle to a roll call in front of Foggie's office. He wondered if that happened every morning. Robby Wilson and his friends seemed to be under the supervision of a counselor they called Uncle Dave, a muscular college-age youth with sandy hair and a ready smile. He led them through some simple calisthenics and then announced a game of something called dodgeball. He formed them into a circle and produced a large inflated ball which the boys began throwing back and forth.

Rand watched for a few moments, until Uncle Dave strolled away. He followed him. "Pardon me, are you Dave?" he called out, catching the young man's attention.

"Dave Jennings. Can I help you?"

Rand introduced himself as he'd done with Foggie. "Was the dead man anyone you knew?" he asked.

Jennings kept walking to a large shed where sporting equipment was stored. "Never saw him before." He selected some baseballs and bats. "Mr. Foggie thinks it was a hunter and I suppose he's right. We've found evidence in the spring that the place is used by hunters."

"What sort of evidence?"

"Oh, cigarette packs, a used deck of cards, some cartridge cases.

Not much—they generally do a pretty good job of cleaning up after themselves.”

“This man Kentowski had only been dead a few months. The body was only slightly decomposed. The hunting season is usually in late autumn, isn’t it?” Rand asked.

Dave Jennings grinned. “People have been known to hunt out of season.”

“He had his face blackened and was wearing Army camouflage gear. Is that common for hunters around here?”

“Not that I ever heard. Usually they wear something bright so they won’t get shot at accidentally. But I’m a city boy myself. This is just a summer job for me, to help pay my way through graduate school.”

Rand nodded. “Thanks for your help.” On his way back to the car, he noticed the boy Robby waving goodbye. He raised his hand and waved back.

Scott Kentowski’s last known address was in Rittensburg, about an hour’s drive from Camp Rainbow. Rand found the house without difficulty and rang the bell. According to the police report, he’d been living with a woman named Sue Tompkinson, and it was she who answered the door.

“I can’t tell you anything I haven’t told the police,” she said after inviting him in. “Scott was mixed up in a lot of crazy military things. I never knew what he was doing.”

“You didn’t report him missing?”

“I didn’t know he was missing,” she said, settling onto the sofa opposite Rand. She had loose brown hair and brown eyes—an attractive woman who appeared to be in her early thirties. “He often went off for long periods of time without telling me when he’d be back. A lot of the trips were out of the country, I know.”

“You weren’t married to him?”

“There’s no way I’d marry someone like Scott. He asked me once, but I told him he’d have to settle down first. He wasn’t ready to do that. My first husband walked out on me and I don’t want another one.”

“When did you last see Scott?”

“Around the middle of March. We went to a St. Patrick’s Day party at the local bar. The next day he told me he had to go away, but that he’d be back. It had happened so many times before, I didn’t think much about it.”

"After four months, didn't you grow concerned?"

"No—that was the sort of guy he was," she said with a shrug. "That was why I could never be married to him. I suppose I always knew he'd end up dead one day, but I expected it to be in some Central American jungle, not up at Camp Rainbow."

"It's a strange world," Rand agreed.

As he was leaving, he noticed a pair of men's shoes in the corner behind the sofa, perhaps kicked there one night and forgotten. Sue Tompkinson was not mourning too much over Scott Kentowski.

Rand's next move was to find a telephone. He put in a long-distance call to the Good Views Real Estate Corporation in Philadelphia. The woman who answered was cooperative only to a point. "Yes, we handle leasings on the Camp Rainbow property," she confirmed, "but it's not available at present."

"What about the winter and spring months?"

"The owner reserves it for private use."

"Who is the owner?"

"That information is confidential. We deal with a corporation in New York and that's all I can tell you."

"This is very important," Rand insisted. "Could I speak to the person in charge?"

"I'm the person in charge," she informed him coolly.

He drove to the county seat, checked the tax records at the courthouse, and found the tax bills on the property were paid regularly by the Cavendish Corporation, with offices on Seventh Avenue in New York. Then he found another telephone. There was a man at the British Consulate with whom he'd worked in London years ago. In Concealed Communications they had called him St. Bernard because he could find the answer to virtually anything.

"Bernard Barnes here."

Rand recognized the familiar voice at the other end.

"Is it still St. Bernard?"

"Who's this?"

"Rand. Remember the old days?"

"Couldn't forget them! Where are you?"

"A place in southern Pennsylvania called Rittensburg."

"Never heard of it. I thought you were retired, Rand."

"So did I. How's the information business?"

"I haven't been home in a long time."

"This is New York information."

"Try me."

"The Cavendish Corporation on Seventh Avenue. Who are they, what do they do? Most important, who are the corporate officers?"

"How soon do you need it?"

"Before noon tomorrow?"

"Call me then. I'll see what I can do. No promises."

Rand had the evening and all night to kill, and the more he thought about it the more convinced he became that the secret of Kentowski's death lay back at Camp Rainbow. He made the one-hour journey back, but this time he didn't drive through the main camp entrance. Instead, he skirted the fenced-in perimeter until he came to an overgrown, little-used service road. His rented car bounced along it for a bit and finally he saw a log cabin straight ahead. A crudely painted sign identified it as POT O' GOLD.

Pot? Visions of people smoking marijuana came to him. But the cabin was unlocked and yielded nothing more than a toy treasure chest filled with cardboard pieces of gold. The pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, he decided—another of Henry Foggie's games to amuse the campers.

He walked further along the trail that seemed to lead toward the lake and the main camp, watching for signs that might have been left other than by children. Occasionally he came upon marks on the trees, but they were all low down, only a few feet from the ground. It wasn't until he was within sight of the lake that one large oak in particular caught his attention. A crude circle had been cut in the bark almost six feet above the ground, at eye level. It was about nine inches in diameter and contained a single carved word: DUST.

Rand stared at it and wondered what it meant.

Dust. Was it the name of some organization?

He touched the roughly carved circle, noted how some fresh carving seemed to have been made over the original, which dipped to a sort of point at the bottom. Likewise the left downstroke on the U seemed a bit fresher than the rest.

"Hello," a small voice behind him said.

He turned and saw Robby Wilson standing on the trail. "Hello yourself. How are you today?"

"Good, I guess. Do you work here?"

"Not really. I'm just looking around the place. Did you ever notice this carving on the tree? What does *dust* mean? Is it some sort of game you boys play?"

Robby looked bewildered. "No, I don't know what it is. We don't

come over here very often, just when Mr. Foghorn has his treasure hunt before we go back home. That cabin back there is supposed to be the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow."

"I suspected as much," Rand murmured.

It was getting dark and he said goodbye to the boy. "Come again," Robby said. "You can meet some of my friends next time, Mr. Rand."

"I'd like that," Rand assured him.

In the morning, he tried to finish a leisurely breakfast before his impatience got the better of him and he telephoned New York. After several minutes on hold he heard the familiar voice of his friend. "Bernard Barnes here."

"St. Bernard, am I too early?"

"No, no, Rand. I have the information for you. That's a strange group you're interested in."

"How strange?"

"Well, Cavendish Coporation seems to own several parcels of real estate around the country, mainly in the East. Some are leased during part of the year for boys' camps and other worthy projects, apparently so no one will ask too many questions about their other use."

"Which is?"

"Training camps for mercenaries. Does that surprise you?"

"I suspected as much. Does the word 'dust' mean anything to you?"

"Dust? Not a thing. Should it?"

"Never mind. Do you have any names for me?"

Barnes ran through five that meant nothing to Rand. "A couple are Cuban exiles that go back to the Sixties. The others are hardcore mercenaries who've put in their time and are too old to fight any more. One of them lost a leg in Angola."

"You know a lot."

"You wouldn't have phoned me, Rand, if I didn't."

"What do you think? Is Cavendish a C.I.A. cover?"

"Not C.I.A., no. I looked back to when the corporation was chartered, during the last administration. One of the original officers served only a year and then had his name removed from the list. He's in Washington now."

"Give me the name."

"John J. Crowther."

"I know the name," Rand said. "Thank you, St. Bernard. I've never known a more reliable colleague."

Next he phoned London. They were five hours ahead in time and he wanted to catch Hastings before he left his office for the day. When the operator answered, he gave the secret extension number and waited. Presently Hastings' voice came on the line.

"I'm calling from America," Rand said, not bothering to identify himself further.

"Ah! How's the weather there?"

"Fairly mild for July. Your man contacted me after the seminar."

"Oh, yes. I thought it was something you could handle. Is he paying well?"

"Too well. How deeply are we involved with him?"

"Why do you ask?"

"The trail leads back to him."

Hastings was silent for a moment. "Do what you think best."

"No problem at your end?"

"No problem."

"One more thing. Does the name Dust mean anything to you?"

"No. Hold on a moment while I run it through the computer." He returned within seconds with, "No luck. Nothing on Dust."

"Thanks, anyway."

"Take care of yourself," Hastings said before ringing off.

Rand was in Washington by day's end, and arranged to meet Crowther at his office after regular working hours. Crowther had preferred his office to a park or a cocktail lounge, and Rand suspected he was planning to tape the conversation.

The office was in the old Executive Office Building west of the White House. Rand's name had been left with the guard in the lobby, and as soon as he showed his identification he was waved through. Crowther was on the top floor, in a modest office overlooking the White House. He was the sort of man who kept his Army awards on the wall and a picture of his wife in a heart-shaped frame on his desk. "Well, Rand—I didn't expect to hear from you quite so quickly. You work fast."

"Dust, Mr. Crowther."

The grey-haired man looked blank. The word seemed to have no special meaning for him. "Have you learned anything?" he asked.

"Camp Rainbow operates only in the summer. The rest of the year the place is used as a training camp for mercenaries, as you suspected. Kentowski was killed during one such training operation."

"Who are these people?"

"Some are aging Cuban exiles interested in Latin American or African ventures. But there are others as well. There are other camps like this, many operating under winter conditions. You don't train in the snow for a Latin American operation. Some are probably for so-called survivalists, preparing to fight a Russian invasion of the United States. Heaven knows what the rest are preparing for."

Crowther moistened his lips. "Do you have any names?"

"Cavendish Corporation."

The man behind the desk blinked. "Can't say I've heard of it."

"That's odd—you were one of the officers when it was founded some eight years ago."

"Look here—"

"You look, Mr. Crowther. The reason you hired me to investigate this matter rather than call in a government department was that you feared your name might come up. You think you can buy me, send me back to England—"

"That's quite enough, Mr. Rand. Your work for me is terminated. Please submit your invoice."

"But there's one thing I still don't understand. Why was Kentowski killed? And if he had to be killed, why was the body left there, with the risk of discovery? It could have been loaded into a van and buried a thousand miles away."

But even as he said it, his eyes fell on the framed picture of Crowther's wife, a woman he'd never seen before—and he knew.

Uncle Dave had promised to take him fishing right after daybreak, before breakfast, and Robby Wilson was up at the first light. He met Dave Jennings down by the boat dock and they pushed off in the little rowboat, bound for the deepest part of the lake. "The fish will be feeding now," the counselor explained as he rowed. "I brought some special line from home. It's better than the camp stuff—harder for the fish to see underwater."

Robby could tell that Uncle Dave really liked him. He'd known it last summer, too. It was one of the treats of coming to Camp Rainbow and putting up with Mr. Foghorn and the rest of them. "How big are the fish out here?" he wanted to know.

"Well, you saw the one I hauled in yesterday. It was a twenty-pounder. We're after another one of those."

"We should have brought Quigley along."

"Is he your best friend at camp?"

"Just about," Robby admitted.

"Maybe next week the three of us can go out together."

"That would be great." Uncle Dave had shown him how to bait a hook and now he carefully attached a worm. The fishing line in the morning light reminded him of something, he tried to remember what.

Dave stood up in the rowboat and cast his line far out in the water. Robby followed his lead, less successfully. "That's farther than you could cast last summer," Dave said, sitting back down.

Robby watched the fishing line run out on his reel and suddenly it came to him. "This is just like the wire I found around that man's neck—the one who was buried."

"I expect most fishing line looks about the same."

"No, this is different—it's wire. The camp fishing line is that nylon or plastic or whatever it is. You said just now you brought this from home."

"Did I?" Dave said. "Actually, I got it out of the supply shed, along with the fishing rods." He stood up suddenly, tugging at his line. "I think I've got a bite."

"Uncle Dave, watch out! You'll tip us—"

The boat went over before he could finish the sentence, and they were plunged into the chilly water. Robby was a good swimmer and didn't panic, but as he sank below the water and tried to come up for air he felt something pressing down on his head. He thought at first he must have hit the bottom of the boat, but—

He broke free, getting his head above water, seeing Uncle Dave by his side. "What happened?" he gasped. "What are you doing?"

They seemed to be wrestling in the water, with Uncle Dave's hands all over him, pushing him down. He couldn't understand what was happening. "Let me go!" he tried to yell. And then his head went under again. This time he couldn't get free. His lungs felt like they would burst. There was more splashing around them and he started to black out. Then someone had his head above the water and was pulling him to shore. He thought at first it must be Uncle Dave, but then he wasn't sure. Finally he felt the dry sand beneath his face and heard the shouts of other boys running to help.

He opened one eye and saw the man in the suit and tie, soggy and dripping now, kneeling over him. Uncle Dave was nowhere in sight.

"He was trying to drown the boy," Rand told police investigators later, after he'd changed out of his wet clothes and met them in

Foggie's office. "That should be enough to hold him on while you gather evidence for the murder charge."

"You're actually telling us that Dave Jennings killed that man months ago and buried his body, and that now he tried to drown Robby Wilson?" Foggie shook his head in disbelief. "But why?"

"To answer the last part first, Robby says he noticed Dave's wire fishing line was the same sort used to strangle Scott Kentowski. Right after he mentioned it, Jennings capsized the boat and tried to hold him under. I arrived in time to see what was happening and went in after the boy. The state police officer with me hauled Jennings to shore and placed him under arrest."

"Why would he kill Kentowski?"

"This place is used as a training camp for mercenaries and others in the off-season. Scott Kentowski was one of those, but oddly enough that's not why he was murdered. The killing was the result of a simple lovers' triangle. Kentowski and Dave Jennings were in love with the same woman. She lives in Rittensburg. I talked with her in her home two days ago and I noticed a pair of men's shoes in the living room, probable evidence someone was staying with her. I believe it's Dave Jennings. He didn't mind that Sue Tompkinson is nearly ten years older than he, but he did mind Kentowski being around. When he found out he'd be at this camp for training last spring, he went in by one of the back roads, strangled him with a length of wire, and buried the body on a remote part of the beach he knew from last summer. It was probably last summer when he carved his initials and Sue Tompkinson's on a tree near there."

"Do couples still do that?" Foggie said.

"Dave Jennings did. He was young enough to be that romantic. The initials were DJ and ST, but with the letters all on one line and the spacing irregular, they looked like DJST. After the killing, he remembered that heart and knew it might become evidence against him. He couldn't cut down the tree, but he did the next best thing. He carved over it, changing the heart into a crude circle, although it still dipped to a point at the bottom. And he added a fresh downstroke on the left side of the J, changing it to a U—so the initials DJST became the word DUST. It was meaningless, but at least it no longer pointed toward a connection between him and Sue Tompkinson."

"We'll question her right away," one of the investigators assured him. "If she talks, it should be the evidence we need."

"That and the fishing line," Rand agreed. "I came out this morning

to confront Jennings with the truth, but Robby had already confronted him about the wire."

"How did you figure out what that tree carving meant?" Fogle asked.

"I was in Washington yesterday and I saw a picture in a heart-shaped frame. I remembered that lovers sometimes carved initials inside hearts."

"What brought you here in the first place, Mr. Rand?"

"What brought me here?" Rand reflected. "I'm not at liberty to tell you that. If you knew, you might say it was a mistake—but I'm glad I came."

As he left Fogle's office, he decided perhaps it hadn't been a mistake, after all. That carving was a concealed communication of a sort. If anyone had made a mistake, it was John Crowther in hiring him. But he suspected Crowther would be leaving the government when the news about Cavendish Corporation was leaked to a newspaper.

Rand went off to find Robby Wilson, to say goodbye before he departed for London.

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

BETTER, BY FAR, THAN A POTION

by DOROTHY BELLE POLLACK

They're taking a cruise on the ocean,
The wife is devoid of devotion—
A little shove over
And she'll be in clover.
(Insurance inspired this notion!)

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a **NEW** short story by

FLORENCE WITKOP

"You have spy's eyes," his wife had teased Sam once. "You look at things differently and it shows in your eyes."

The previous story by Edward D. Hoch represents one of hundreds he has published. This story by Florence Witkop, although she is an author new to our pages, is one of possibly a hundred she has published nationally over the past five years. (She is fifty, married, the mother of five, and the grandmother of twelve. "I have done a lot in my life," she says, "from housework to teaching school, to factory work, to writing, to owning and operating a fishing and hunting resort in the northern Minnesota wilderness with my husband. So you can guess where this story came from.")

And so we have a pair of stories about spies back to back—Mr. Hoch's set in a summer camp in southern Pennsylvania, Ms. Witkop's at a hunting lodge presumably in northern Minnesota, brought to you at a time of year that is admittedly off season for both . . .

SPY'S EYES

by FLORENCE WITKOP

I found the wallet in the morning when I was cleaning the lobby. I sighed, wondering at the carelessness of mankind in general and deer hunters in particular. One of last night's group must have dropped it when they checked in. Now I'd have to return it, when all I really wanted was to close down the resort and sit in front of the fire and cry.

I checked the name against the guest registry. It didn't match any

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of the three names signed there, not even allowing for the worst possible spelling. So I had been right and they did have something they wanted to hide.

Sam and I had been in the business long enough to tell the difference between real deer hunters and guys who didn't know a white-tailed deer from a leopard and who didn't care to learn, but who liked the hunting excuse to spend some time away from their homes and families. They usually came with a few cases of Jack Daniels and sometimes brought a hooker along for a little added interest.

That group last night had certainly hustled someone extra into their cabin when they thought I wasn't looking. If Sam were still alive, he'd laugh till he fell off his chair and we'd both get a kick out of the closed doors and the way the "hunters" cars never did get into the woods.

Sam wasn't alive, though. The government agency he worked for—the one that kept asking him back for "one last job"—had finally asked once too often and he had paid for his willingness to help out with his life.

Well, I might as well get the wallet back to its owner, I thought—muddle through the messy situation when I knocked on the door to the cabin and they all scurried around like mice, hiding the hooker before answering. Then I could get on with closing down the place for the winter. And when this last rental of the season left, I could collapse in front of the fire and grieve for Sam.

The door was locked. The car was gone. I peered in the cabin windows and saw no one. Using the master key, I went inside. No hooker anywhere. No Jack Daniels, either. Nothing but the few extra clothes of three men dressed as if they were on a business trip instead of hunting deer. So where were the belongings of the fourth person they had sneaked in? And who was that person?

I tried to shake off the faint unease that crept over me. Too many years married to an intelligence agent. Too many years watching his eyes dilate slightly when things weren't quite right. "You have spy's eyes," I teased him once. "You look at things differently and it shows in your eyes." He had laughed, throwing his head back so I couldn't see his eyes any longer, grabbed me in a bear hug, and that ended the conversation. But it was true that there was something about his eyes.

I looked about the empty cabin, about as far removed from spies as possible, and left, determined not to worry about the wallet any

longer. Except, as I shut the door a paper fell out of the wallet. A deer-hunting license.

Our game warden—new, young, and zealous—would go charging through the woods to check everything out, to keep the hunting legal, to do his job. These last hunters of the season would surely be checked. And when he checked out their licenses, and one hunter didn't have his, and they all came trooping back and he found that the names were false, things would get really messy and I'd never get rid of these pesky people.

There was only one thing to do. In disgust, I dressed in the required orange jacket everyone wears in the woods in hunting season, grabbed the car keys, and set out to return the wallet before the game warden found them.

Their car tracks twisted and turned over some remote fire trails and I changed my opinion of them somewhat. Novices usually stayed close to civilization. This group seemed determined to get as far from it as possible—on the edge of the big woods even, the woods that went on for hundreds of miles without a break.

The ground was muddy. Their tracks stood out even as the trail petered out and became a mere whisper of space between the trees. Space so narrow that when I finished my little chore I'd have to back up half a mile before I could turn around and drive home.

Their footprints in the mud were as easy to follow as their car tracks, and the wet woods muffled any sounds I made. Only their voices could be heard above the dripping of the trees, and they were raised in argument.

When a group of men carrying rifles are arguing, it's wise to think twice before approaching them, so I stopped behind a huge evergreen tree to size up the situation before walking into their midst.

There were four of them. So I was right about the non-paying guest. He was large and rather powerful-looking. And he was the one they were arguing with.

Or rather, he was doing the arguing. His back was against a jackpine almost as large as the one I hid behind, his hands sliding up and down against the bark as he talked to the other three, who were carrying their rifles. His gun lay on the ground a few yards beyond the group. He kept glancing at it as he talked. "It was a job. I did my job. You'd do the same." He stared at the other three defiantly.

"You didn't have to kill him. You didn't have to kill any of them."

"I had to stop him."

"You were supposed to help him. You were supposed to help all of them, but they all ended up dead." The voice was flat, unemotional. Some sort of jury had returned, some sort of verdict had been rendered.

"Hey, you think I'd kill someone just to save my own skin?"

"That's exactly what we think."

"You're crazy!" he pleaded.

"You're dangerous to all of us as long as you live."

"The department can't do anything. We can."

The last two spoke at once and the three moved closer to him. He reached out wildly for the gun on the ground and everything went into slow motion, like on television, as one of them calmly aimed his rifle and there was a shot. The man leaning against the tree stopped talking and crumpled slowly to the ground.

The others moved methodically, wiping the prints from the gun that did the killing and putting it on the ground next to the victim so it would look like he had shot himself accidentally. Then one of the men turned and picked up the rifle on the ground I'd thought belonged to the victim, and as he took hold of it his eyes strayed about the clearing—and looked straight into mine.

We stared at each other. Then the other two, following his look, saw me, too. And slowly, warily, they started toward me, rifles in their hands.

I turned and ran, scrabbling through the mud, dropping the wallet as I ran. They paused and picked it up, giving me precious seconds to disappear into the woods. I veered off the trail, crashing through the underbrush in a desperate attempt to get away.

If I could reach the car, I'd be safe. I'd speed into town and not stop until I reached the police station. Except, I realized with a sinking heart, I'd have to back up half a mile before I could turn around and they could reach me with their rifles long before I could get away.

So I ran past the car and on into the deep woods beyond.

Sam had told me about the big woods, the wilderness he loved so much, where people could disappear without a trace if they weren't careful, where the deer went to ground when hunting season began, not to reappear until the last guns were silent.

I would disappear there, too. I would hide like the deer, and like the deer I would be safe.

The ground rose gradually as I ran, an indication I was going the

right way because the big woods are high and hilly. And, as I ran, the mud firmed and my tracks disappeared. I slowed at last, then stopped and stripped off my orange jacket. I was a homing beacon with it on. I stuffed it under a bed of orange and brown leaves and hoped it didn't show and make a trail for them to follow. My breath was ragged, my side ached, and I looked for a place to hide. I couldn't run much more.

There was a small depression on the side of a hill. When I crawled inside, I saw wisps of hair and small bones strewn about. The lair of some animal. I didn't even shudder as I took it over and lay still, trying to quiet my terrified breathing.

They paused mere yards from me and cast about for signs of my passing. I could hear them clearly.

"I know she came this way."

"Damn woman. Why didn't she stay home where she belonged?"

"Why didn't you hang onto your wallet so she wouldn't chase after us?"

"Maybe she's in those trees."

They moved toward a grove of tangled trees and I breathed a prayer of thanks.

Sam once told me how he'd had to learn to control his breathing. "When you're in a tight spot, little things are important."

"The way you talk, it's just like hunting."

"It is, in a way."

"Which were you, the hunter or the hunted?"

"Sometimes I hunted. Sometimes I was hunted." Sam was a good hunter. And he was good at his job. Until that last time.

Eventually, the three men left. I listened to their voices as they went back the way they came, but it was over an hour before I came out of my hiding place.

I looked at the sky. It was getting late. The weather forecast had a storm front moving in. Snow maybe, by evening. I could feel the coolness through the thin shirt I wore. But there was no way I dared retrieve the orange windbreaker. I would die in that.

Maybe I could outwit the storm. I could cut crosscountry, hoping to find my way through the woods, circling around the parked car until I was far enough away to be safe, then cutting through the trees to the road and flagging down a passerby.

But I couldn't move quickly enough to keep warm, and I couldn't keep in a straight line. And as the clouds moved across the sun,

there was nothing to guide me except instinct. Then, from high above the evergreens, the first snowflakes began to fall. The tops of the trees moved slightly in the first trailing gusts of wind and all too soon the world turned into a swirling whiteness. And I accepted the fact that I could be dead very soon.

I almost fell over the body before I realized I'd made the dumbest mistake a greenhorn can make. I had gone full circle in the woods and come back to the small clearing where the killing had happened. The body was almost covered with snow, the rifle still beside the outstretched hand, but I could remember how the man had looked alive and my stomach rebelled. I retched until there was nothing left in me.

At least I knew where I was. I headed toward the car—my only hope now that the snow had come in. If I turned back and headed into the big woods again, I'd freeze to death before I could circle to the road. If the three men were waiting at the car, I'd decide then what to do. My mind was numbing. I could think only one step ahead now. Then I fell. The final irony, I slipped in the cold mud and got my leg stuck beneath a fallen tree. I pulled and twisted and yanked, but I couldn't free it.

I was going to die. Those nameless hunters would win after all, without even knowing it. Damn! Damn! I began screaming, not even knowing it until I heard myself. Because I was going to die, and I couldn't let that happen without telling God it wasn't fair. I screamed and screamed and screamed.

Something large and bulky moved toward me in the shadows of the path ahead. A shape in the snow. No, three shapes. It was the hunters, coming to see me dead. I stopped screaming and waited, daring them to look me in the eye.

"Her leg's caught," one of them said. The other two took hold of the log and pulled it up, while he put his arms about me and pulled me clear. The log crashed back in the freezing mud.

"Can you stand?" one asked. As if nothing had happened. As if they were out for a stroll and found a woman in trouble. As if they weren't murderers and I the only witness.

I *couldn't* stand. When I tried, I fell. So they lifted me, one at each side, and half dragged, half carried me to the car. Which made no sense. No sense at all.

Two drove me back to the lodge in my car, the third following in

their car. They set me down in a big overstuffed chair and propped my hurt leg on a footstool. One of them built a roaring fire in the fireplace while another examined my leg. "I don't think it's broken," he told me and his companions.

Silence fell. They stared at each other. Finally, one cleared his throat and said, "It's snowing pretty hard, Mrs. Norman. We've got to get out of here or we'll be stranded. We looked for you longer than we should have."

They got back into their coats, gathered their rifles, and moved toward the door.

I croaked out, "Why?"

They stopped, turned. "Why did we do it?" the one who had pulled me clear of the log said.

I nodded, unable to say the words.

"Because he killed someone he was supposed to be working with."

And as I looked into his eyes, I suddenly felt I was looking into Sam's eyes. Spy's eyes.

And suddenly I knew why they had chosen Sam Norman's woods for their execution.

When they opened the door, the first blast of winter air moved into the room, raising the hair on my neck, making the fire dance. Then they closed the door and were gone. I could barely hear their car as they left because of the rising wind blowing around the outside of the lodge.

I sat for a long time after they left, not thinking, seeing Sam's face, until my hurt leg turned stiff. When the fire died down, I hobbled over to it and put another log on, then went back to sit and watch the flames grow high again.

The woods would be white now. By morning there would be inches of the white stuff. By spring there would be feet upon feet of it. And when it melted at last, it would carry with it all the harsh reality of sudden death, along with any possibility of discovering the identities of the killers.

I leaned back and let my eyes drift to the window, to the snow falling thick and fast, and I listened to the sound of the wind through the evergreens. I would hear that sound all winter. By spring it would be a part of me, like the whiteness of the snow, and the knowledge that justice had been done.

The big woods are vast and little traveled. It would be years before anyone went to that small clearing again.

THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

Southern California has long been a favorite mystery locale, particularly Los Angeles (with the emphasis on Hollywood), Beverly Hills, Santa Barbara (usually under an assumed name), and occasionally San Diego or Palm Springs. But only recently has Orange County, that fast-growing, stereotypically conservative area between L.A. and San Diego, been put on the mystery map by such writers as A. E. Maxwell, Robert J. Ray, Maxine O'Callaghan, Raymond Obstfeld, and perhaps most notably the author of 1985's widely publicized *Laguna Heat*.

**** T. Jefferson Parker: *Little Saigon*, St. Martin's, \$18.95. Parker's debut was impressive, but his second is even better. The setting is the Vietnamese refugee enclave in Westminster, California, where disabled vet Bennett Frye is a key figure in the community's efforts to thwart the Hanoi regime. The narrator is Bennett's brother Chuck, a champion surfer and family black sheep whose efforts to help when Bennett's Vietnamese wife Li is kidnaped seem doomed to fail. The fresh background is sensitively and expertly depicted and the style outclasses that of most bestselling novelists, but thriller fans will be grateful that Parker is not "transcending the genre." This insistently readable novel has real heroes, real villains, dramatic confrontations, Saturday-matinee ac-

tion, and a well constructed plot full of satisfying surprises and reversals.

*** James Yaffe: *A Nice Murder for Mom*, St. Martin's, \$15.95. Mom, the Jewish mother whose armchair detection helps her New York policeman son Dave with his cases, debuted in *EQMM* in 1952 and last appeared here in 1968. The first novel in the series has all of the charm of the regrettably uncollected short stories. Following his wife's death, Dave has moved to Mesa Grande, Colorado, to work as investigator for the Public Defender's office. Mom chances to visit just when a college professor is mysteriously murdered, apparently while talking on the phone to a colleague at a faculty party. As a Watson character, the rather dense Dave is not far above the Captain Hastings level, and one key aspect of the solution, not revealed until page 163, would be painfully obvious to the experienced mystery reader even if it weren't tipped in the jacket copy. But the ingenious, multi-level solution invites an adjective mystery reviewers rarely have a chance to use any more: *Queenian*.

*** Thomas H. Cook: *Flesh and Blood*, Putnam, \$17.95. Frank Clemons, former Atlanta cop now a New York private eye, finds the murder of a clothing designer's elderly assistant has its roots in labor strife of the Thirties. The plot

is tantalizing, the characters and urban atmosphere deftly done, the culprit and motive well worth the trip. On the debit side, there's some padding evident (mostly repetitious dialogue) to fill the 300 pages, and you may have a problem with Clemons if brooding heroes exasperate you—and with sidekick Farouk if characters who talk like a Hemingway parody try your patience.

*** Nancy Pickard: *Dead Crazy*, Scribners, \$16.95. Pickard, pegged as a comic writer after her early books, has kept her sense of humor but addressed very serious issues in her last two. In 1987's *Marriage Is Murder* it is spousal abuse. Here it is the plight of the prematurely "mainstreamed" mentally ill. Jenny Cain, who manages the Civic Foundation of Port Frederick, Massachusetts, again encounters murder, to the dismay of her policeman husband. The plot is sound if not scintillating, and the style, pace, and character drawing are all first rate.

*** Jane Dentinger: *Death Mask*, Scribners, \$16.95. Readers who relish the theatrical mysteries of Ngaio Marsh and Simon Brett should discover the Jocelyn O'Roarke series, now in its third volume. Josh is directing a production of Shaw's *Major Barbara* as part of an effort to save the historic Burbage Theater. The great stage actor Frederick Revere brings his dicky heart out of retirement to star. The theatrical background is outstanding, and the strong puzzle features an ingenious murder method. The conclusion is a bit

elongated with the final surprise telegraphed, but these are minor defects.

*** Robert Campbell: *Red Cent*, Pocket Books, \$3.50. In his second case, railroad detective Jake Hatch confronts two problems: one professional (the murder of a wealthy passenger, shot through a dining-car window, ostensibly by drunken Indians trying to kill the "Iron Horse") and one personal (the demise of the sexual revolution and its effect on his hospitable network of spinsters, widows, and divorcees). This book offers a good puzzle with plenty of suspects along with the author's usual bittersweet world view.

*** Jerry Kenneally: *Polo's Ponies*, St. Martin's, \$14.95. San Francisco private eye Nick Polo solves a racing mystery, beginning with the discovery of a murdered bookie in the men's room at Golden Gate Fields. Himself a private investigator, Kenneally tells a typical hard-boiled detective story (with ample sex and violence), overlaid with an unusually realistic depiction of a private eye's methods.

Reprints worth noting include Colin Dexter's *The Secret of Annexe 3* (Bantam, \$3.95), a typically ingenious 1987 case for Oxford's Chief Inspector Morse, who has recently gained a deservedly wider following via PBS; Bill Pronzini and Barry Malzberg's remarkable 1976 collaboration, *The Running of Beasts* (Black Lizard, \$4.95), which shifts viewpoint and suspicion among a small cast of suspects in a masterpiece of trick construction; and Max Allan Collins' *Pri-*

mary Target (Paperjacks, \$3.95), 1987's criminal comeback for series assassin Quarry, one of the most interesting paperback-original characters (I won't say heroes) of the Seventies, here asked to kill a presidential candidate.

Two new original anthologies are highly recommended to short-story readers. *Mr. President, Private Eye* (Ballantine, \$3.50), edited by Martin H. Greenberg and Francis M. Nevins, Jr., begins with Edward D. Hoch's "The Tragedy of 1799," which turns Washington's historic last words into a dying message, and ends with K. T. Anders' very funny "A Fatal Trip," involving Gerald Ford in a spy caper that provides the solution to a recent presidential mystery of less than cosmic proportions. Best story of the lot may be Edward Wellen's "Japandora's Box," with the obscure Millard Fillmore doing some of the detecting and a last scene that is a gem of reader trickery-nudgery. The nine other stories present presidential mysteries by such writers as Dorothy B. Hughes, Joe L. Hensley, Henry Slesar, Ed Gorman, Sharyn McCrumb, and Stuart Kaminsky.

In *Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe: A Centennial Celebration* (Knopf, \$18.95), edited by Byron Preiss, an impressive double dozen well known mystery writers pay homage to Chandler with their own Marlowe stories. The best approximations of Chandler's style come from the writers who write

most like Chandler normally, Loren D. Estleman and Jonathan Valin, but the prize of the book may be Benjamin Schutz's "The Black-eyed Blonde," with a powerful ending very reminiscent of the climax to the film *Chinatown*. One of the more surprising contributors is Britain's Simon Brett, whose effective pastiche of Chandler's style conveys some of the same foreigner's fascination the English-raised Chandler brought to the American idiom. Among the other contributors are writers as varied as Joyce Harrington, Dick Lochte, Julie Smith, Francis M. Nevins, Jr., Robert J. Randisi, Sara Paretsky, Jeremiah Healy, and Robert Campbell. Chandler's own Marlowe short, "The Pencil," closes out the volume.

A similar volume, published in 1987 to commemorate the centennial of *A Study in Scarlet*, has now appeared in trade paperback. *The New Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (Carroll & Graf, \$8.95), edited by Martin Harry Greenberg and Carolyn Rossel Waugh, has sixteen contributions, nearly all original and most serious pastiches of the Holmes canon. Among the best are John Lutz's "The Infernal Machine" and Edward D. Hoch's "The Return of the Speckled Band." Among the other writers trying their hand at Holmes tales are some heavy hitters indeed: Michael Gilbert, Dorothy B. Hughes, Lillian de la Torre, and Stephen King.

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a **NEW** short story by

HENRY SLESAR

"I didn't say she was a detective," Skip's mother said. "She's a medium, like Mrs. Fitzmaurice, only sort of extra-sensitive. Sometimes things come to her without anyone asking, if you know what I mean."

"I know somebody's after your pocketbook again, Ma. Why do you want to go wasting Pop's pension on these fakers?"

"It's not me she wants to see," his mother said soberly. "It's you."

The taste of anger was in Skip's mouth, but he swallowed it. "The whole police force doesn't know who shot Mitch. You mean to tell me this woman does. . . ?"

POSSESSION

by **HENRY SLESAR**

The chessboard was all set up by the time Skip arrived at his parents' house in Stormville. As always, his father had seated himself in the Black position, offering him the first-move advantage, a benign concession dating back to his childhood. Skip ignored the little tug of resentment he felt. He was twenty-nine, a police detective, and a better chessplayer.

But not tonight. After dinner, Joe Landis played his customary patzer's game, sly and chancy, and usually no match for Skip's straightforward, muscular style. But tonight a lack of concentration did him in—he fell between the assault of two bishops and resigned. His father didn't hoot or cackle, knowing how heavy a weight lay on those tight blond curls, the burden of grief pulling down those

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big shoulders. Twenty-nine? His father and mother both saw a suffering twelve-year-old slumped in their overstuffed armchair.

"So, no luck yet?" Joe said, hunting for the pipe he was no longer permitted to smoke. "Still didn't catch that guy, huh?"

"Not yet, Pop."

"So many rotten hoodlums out there, you got too many to choose from. What you ought to do is round up fifty or a hundred of the bastards, stick 'em all in the electric chair. You'll probably get the right one."

"It doesn't work that way, Pop." Skip looked up as his mother came in carrying a dessert tray.

"I know, I know," his father sighed. "Hey, you know me, the old liberal from way back. But when I hear about things like what happened to your friend Mitch, I start thinking like the Ayatollah, you know what I mean?"

"Sure, Pop," Skip said, wondering how to tell his mother he didn't want the chocolate pudding she was already crowning with whipped cream from a can. He decided it would be simpler to eat it without argument—the sooner he concluded this duty visit, the sooner he could get back to headquarters and find out what was happening, whether Homicide or the special task force had come up with anything. He could have telephoned, but he didn't want to face the instant disappointment of learning that Mitch Rodriguez' death was still only a question mark in an empty folder, just as it had been for the past three weeks.

The sweet, soft, sentimental taste of the dessert was soothing. He knew why he had been invited, of course, that his parents were aware how much he had been affected by the murder of the man who had been his first partner, his mentor, his best friend. He had brought Mitch home one night, and they had been awed (intimidated?) by the sight of his Hispanic bulk and then enchanted (relieved?) when he played Chopin on the piano and told them about his family, remarkably like their own. Mitch had eased their fears about Skip's safety in the perilous profession he had chosen, and they were grateful.

Six years of friendship later, Mitch was dead, a victim of that profession. Skip's parents had learned about it from the six o'clock news, but he had been there in person, had seen the faceless corpse loaded into the ambulance, had shouted in helpless rage. The sorrow came later. He had wept on the doorstep when he went to tell Mitch's wife Rosa the bad news. When the rage returned, it was like a

firestorm, especially when Homicide and all the other Department divisions came up with nothing to explain that sudden explosion of gunshots—no motive, no suspects, nothing but the achingly unsatisfactory conclusion that it had been a random killing by a cop-hating psycho.

“Wash or dry?”

Skip glanced at his mother, who gave him a bent little smile. “I don’t let your father help with the dishes any more,” she said. “He’s not supposed to be on his feet. At least that’s what he tells me. A great alibi, his phlebitis.”

When they were alone at the sink, he expected some homey expressions of her maternal concern, but she surprised him by saying: “I know what you think about my friends on South Street, but just maybe one of them could help you.”

He answered with a groan, hoping it would be sufficient, but his mother persisted. “I’m not saying it’s anything sure, they can’t always make contact. But if they could, if one of them could get through to your friend Mitch, who would know better? Who’s the best person to ask who did this terrible thing to him? Don’t laugh. I can see you’re laughing.”

Skip wasn’t. He was grimacing. But he decided against his normal display of derision whenever his mother introduced the topic of her “friends,” the spiritual “advisers”—the “channelers,” they called themselves these days—who were always happy to provide their own long-distance service, to arrange for her to talk to her dead father, her brother Bern, her beloved grandmother who croaked out words of endearment from Beyond the Grave in the same hoarse voice as Madame Plotzky or whoever had current possession of the ectoplasm franchise on South Street.

“She’s not on South Street,” his mother said, as if reading his mind. “The one I’m thinking about lives in the city.”

“Who?”

“Her name is Carmen Lopes. She lives on East Sixteenth Street. Mrs. Fitzmaurice was talking to her, and she said she thought she could do something about the case.”

“I see,” Skip said, spotting a diplomatic escape route. “She’s one of these psychic detectives, right? Sorry, Mom. The Department’s got a policy about those people.”

“I didn’t say she was a detective. She’s a medium, like Mrs. Fitzmaurice, only sort of extra-sensitive. Sometimes things come to her without anyone asking, if you know what I mean.”

"I know somebody's after your pocketbook again, Ma. Why do you want to go wasting Pop's pension on these fakers?"

"It's not me she wants to see," his mother said soberly. "It's you."

The taste of anger was in his mouth, but he swallowed it. "The whole police force doesn't know who shot Mitch. You mean to tell me this woman does?"

"No," his mother said, handing him a wet sugar bowl. "I'm saying *Mitch* does. Would it hurt your pride so much to see this woman? If it means so much to you, does your pride matter?"

The next morning, Ray Eberhart, the best Homicide cop Skip had ever met, sat on the edge of his desk and gave him a hard answer to his question. "No," he said bluntly, "we're not going to crack this one unless we get lucky. Somebody's going to have to walk in here and *tell* us who shot Mitch."

When Ray left, Skip reached for the phonebook. As he dialed the number of Carmen Lopes, he said aloud: "Dumbest thing I ever did."

Carmen Lopes sounded quietly grateful. "Thank you for calling me," she said. "You probably hate the whole idea, but please come to see me. Anytime. I'm in the whole evening."

He arrived at ten minutes of seven. He had to turn down three invitations to supper with people who still treated him like an invalid since Mitch's death. That's what he felt like, actually—someone just out of a sick bed—but now, walking up the worn steps of Carmen Lopes' brownstone on East Sixteenth Street he also felt like a damned fool.

He expected a stuffy apartment with a shawl on the piano and embroidered furniture. Instead, the living room was simply, almost starkly furnished. Carmen Lopes didn't fit any stereotype, either. She was younger than Skip expected her to be—early thirties, maybe—with large dark eyes overwhelming small, vulnerable features. She seemed afraid of him.

"I always know when someone doesn't believe," she said, with an attempted smile. "In your case, I could hear it in your voice over the telephone."

"You're right, Mrs. Lopes, I don't 'believe.' "

"I'm not married. And it's okay about not believing. Sometimes I don't myself. Sometimes what happens to me doesn't seem possible."

"But profitable?"

He said it lightly, but the question seemed to startle her. "I'm not asking for money, you know. Did you think I was?"

"You're in business, aren't you?"

"No," she said. "I work for a broker, on Duane. This is just something I do for friends, or—when it has to be done." She seemed anxious for his approval, but Skip was getting restless.

"Why don't we get right to it, then? Tell me what you think you know about the shooting of Mitchell Rodriguez."

"Why, nothing," she said. "I don't know anything about it. I just have this *feeling*. I had it the night I heard about it on TV. It was very strong." She shut her eyes. "I think he wants to tell me about it."

"Then why hasn't he?"

"Because I haven't been able to reach him. I can't, really, without the presence of somebody *he* wants to reach. Do you understand?"

"And you think that person is me?"

"I saw you on the news, that interview. You had tears in your eyes, I knew you were close to him. So when Mrs. Fitzmaurice said she knew your mother— All I'm asking you to do is try."

"Try what exactly?" Skip said. "A seance?"

"I suppose you can call it that. But don't worry: there won't be other people, we won't sit around a table and hold hands. The way it happens for me, I just sit in the dark and wait. You and me, we would wait together. If your friend wants to reach you, he will. He'll speak through me. That's how it works. Or doesn't work. I just can't tell until we try."

The long speech seemed to exhaust her. She sat down in a straight-backed chair and folded her hands in her lap. "I'd offer you a drink," she said, "but I don't keep spirits in the house." She smiled. "My mother used to say that as a sort of a joke. She *was* in business."

Skip said, "So you inherited this—talent?"

"I've had trance episodes since I was six. The doctors called them 'fugues.' My mother didn't take advantage of me, I'll say that much for her. I always had a fever afterward, sometimes a convulsion— Can we start now, please? Before I lose my nerve?"

Skip was more anxious than she was to get it over with. He was bothered by something more than his capitulation, a sense that this woman might be sincere. He might not even have the satisfaction of exposing a fraud, of purging some of his anger. Skip needed to be angry at somebody, and Carmen Lopes with her venal exploitation of Mitch's death would have done just fine.

She asked him to sit in a boxy chair of imitation leather, and then rose to turn off the light. The darkness was so complete that Skip didn't see her return to the straight-backed chair, but she was there, all right; he heard her measured breathing. It was the only sound in the room, except for the almost imperceptible tick of a clock somewhere in another part of the apartment. Skip had done enough night duty to train his eyes to rapid adaptation and he was soon perceiving her faint outline, her body so rigid it seemed to be a fixed part of the chair's silhouette.

They sat silently for what seemed like an interminable length of time, although Skip was sure it wasn't more than three or four minutes. He was trying to decide on a deadline when Carmen groaned.

"What is it?" Skip said. "Are you okay?"

She groaned again and Skip was annoyed to feel the ripple of an icy sensation on his spine. It was all in the staging, of course. Theatrics. He wasn't immune to the primeval effects of darkness on the imagination, but he resented having them artificially stirred. When Carmen caught a sob in her throat, he almost stood up with the intention of finding the light switch, but he stopped when he heard the voice, *her* voice, of course, but modified, altered, halfway between a whisper and—what? He wasn't sure. It was so low-pitched it should have been inaudible, and yet it wasn't. He could hear her distinctly. She was speaking his name—but that was different, too.

"Skipper. Skipper—"

Only his parents called him Skipper, the result of his winning a model-boat race at the age of ten, and Mitch had picked it up. And somehow so had Carmen Lopes, using her ghostly half whisper of a voice that did bear a faint resemblance to Mitch's.

The blood rushed to Skip's head. Satisfying anger burned in his throat. He wanted to pull her out of that chair and shout his fury, but something held him back and forced him to listen.

"Skipper," the voice said. "Ask her. Ask *her*."

"Ask her *what*?"

There was no reply.

"Miss Lopes," Skip said loudly, "what am I supposed to ask you?"

"Ask *her*," the voice said, now hoarse with urgency. "Rosa. *Rosa*."

"Rosa!" Skip repeated, startled to hear the name in this dark room. He hardly knew his partner's wife—Mitch had rarely talked about his home life, keeping it separate and distinct. "What does Rosa have to do with it?" he said. "What am I supposed to ask her?"

There was a pause that wasn't a complete silence, and the voice said: "Why I'm dead."

Then the woman was sobbing, sobbing in her own voice, heart-break in the sound. Acting on instinct, Skip hit the light switch.

Carmen Lopes was no longer rigid. Her body had folded into itself, her head almost in her lap, her hands covering her face. Skip didn't know what to do. She had said something about feverish reactions to her trances, even convulsions. Was she ill? Was this some form of occult grief? Or simply part of the con? Whatever its cause, the tears were real; they were so profuse that they flowed out from between her fingers. He took a hesitant step toward her, but then she looked up, her coal-dark eyes even larger through the magnifying lens of moisture.

"What did I say?" she pleaded. "Please tell me! What did I say about that man?"

"You didn't mention him," Skip said. "You mentioned his wife. You said I should ask her something, but I don't know what."

She simply stared back. Skip realized she had nothing more to say to him. There was something naked about her now and observing her like this was kind of an embarrassment. It was time to leave.

There were two messages on his answering machine. One was from his mother, asking him to do what he had already done. The other was from Enid, the actress-waitress he was seeing. She left a number where she could be reached. Instead, he dialed the number of Rosa Rodriguez and asked if he could come over. She seemed surprised by the request, as if his one condolence call had been sufficient, but she said to come ahead.

The Rodriguez apartment was in one of the better housing projects. It had a view of the river and good security, mainly because of high occupancy of police officers, but it was showing signs of decay. The same could be said of Rosa Rodriguez. When Skip had first met her, she was a bubbly young woman with the body of a flamenco dancer. Now she was thick at the waist and the lines in her face had nothing to do with laughter.

The visit was even more uncomfortable than his first. At least then there had been a clear errand, and emotion to write the scenario. Now they moved about each other uncertainly, Skip grateful for the drink and the chair she offered. He answered her first question even before it was formed.

"Nothing yet," he said. "We're still waiting for a break. That's

what usually happens, somebody gets drunk in a bar and starts bragging, somebody hears him. You know about the reward?"

"No," Rosa said.

"That newspaper publisher. He's offering twenty-five thousand for information leading to conviction. We had two dozen calls the first day, none of them worth a damn."

"I read where they might call it off, give it up."

"Don't believe it. No homicide case is ever closed. Especially when it's a cop. But one thing is true, they're not dragging in people like they did at first."

"Yes—even Luis," Rosa said. Skip looked at her blankly. "My brother Luis. They hold him for three weeks now, for nothing. Maybe you could do something for him."

Skip hadn't even known there was a brother.

"What was the charge?" he asked.

"Possession."

Thoughts of the occult. But of course she meant possession of narcotics.

"It was all a mistake," Rosa said. "I think maybe it was planted on him. Not by the cops," she added hastily. "Somebody he knows—a jealous girl friend, I think." She tried a smile. "Luis is a devil with girls—from one to the other, like a butterfly. Will you see what you can do, Skip?"

"Sure, Rosa, of course," he said. "His full name is what?"

"Luis Madrid," she said.

"Mitch never mentioned a brother-in-law. Did they get along okay?"

"Oh, yes," Rosa said. "I mean, they didn't see each other much, but then *I* didn't see much of Mitch, did I? You cops." She meant it to sound ruefully affectionate, but it came out flat.

When he left, she walked him to the door and said: "Tell me what you think, Skip, what you really believe. About the chances of finding the one who did it?"

He looked at her directly and said: "The truth? Not too good. If we were going to get a break, we would have gotten it by now. That's what I think, but I could be wrong."

In the street, he was troubled. She had taken his bad news too well. She didn't *rage*. If Mitch's best friend felt rage, why didn't his wife?

At the precinct, he spoke to a narcotics officer named Spier who

came up with Luis Madrid with no trouble. He had been picked up at a crack house on the night of a planned police raid. There went the jealous-girl-friend story.

There was one fact that caught Skip's attention. The arrest was made on the night Mitch was shot. As if Rosa didn't have enough dumped on her head that night. Yet she had spoken of Luis with loving indulgence.

Skip went out with Enid that evening. She took him to a cramped little theater in the Village to see an uplifting verse drama. Enid was always trying to improve his cultural outlook, but the play made no sense to him. He tuned it out, thinking other thoughts, trying to answer other questions than those being asked by the playwright. Suddenly one appeared that hit him hard.

Why hadn't *Rosa* mentioned the date her brother was busted? It should have been engraved on her mind, just as it was on Mitch's tombstone. Why didn't she say anything to Skip about the grim coincidence?

Enid was pleased with Skip's deeply thoughtful expression when they left the theater, certain he had been moved by art.

In the morning, he saw Luis Madrid in the visiting room of the holding center, offering his credentials as a friend of his brother-in-law. Luis still looked suspicious, even when Skip said, "You won't have a hard time. It's a first-time offense—the worst you'll get is a slap on the wrist."

"I already got three weeks in here," Luis said bitterly. "Who'll give me back my three weeks?" He was handsome, vain, older than his sister maybe by ten years. If he let his hair go grey, he could have passed for her father. It was true about his police record—his yellow sheet was blank—but Luis Madrid had been in the country less than a year, who knew what he was doing back home?

When Skip asked why he was picked up, Luis shrugged. He wasn't a user, he said, he was too careful about his body. He worked out. He had a good job with a roofing-and-insulation company. That night he had just gotten a little drunk with friends—he was along for the companionship.

Which didn't track with the arrest report, which stated that none of the customers in the crack house knew each other. But it wasn't Luis Madrid's words that haunted Skip for the rest of the day. It was Carmen Lopes'. Or rather, the chilling half whisper that came out of her throat. Ask *her* why I'm dead.

At five o'clock, Skip learned that Luis would be released. He strolled over to the housing project to tell Rosa the good news, but she wasn't home. He was about to leave when he heard the music in the apartment next door and remembered a primary rule of investigation: always talk to the nearest neighbor. He rang the doorbell, and a woman in her late fifties, wearing thick-lensed glasses prescribed for cataract patients, stared out. She wasn't alarmed by the police badge he flashed and let him in, happy for the social opportunity. Her name was Mrs. Fuchs and she had only three cats for company.

"Sure, I'm friendly with Mrs. Rodriguez. She's a nice quiet woman. Not that things have been so quiet over there *lately*." She cocked her head and gave him a wise smile.

"What do you mean by that, Mrs. Fuchs?"

"Well, you know—a lot of shouting and fighting. All in Spanish, so don't ask me what they were fighting about."

"Do you mean Mrs. Rodriguez and her husband?"

"No, not him. He hasn't been around for practically six months. Isn't it terrible what happened?"

"Yes," Skip said. "So if it wasn't her husband, Mrs. Fuchs, who was she quarreling with?"

"She tells people he's her brother." One of the cats was on the sofa cushion beside her. Their expressions were identical.

"If you mean Luis Madrid," Skip frowned, "he *is* her brother." She blinked behind the thick lenses, obviously disappointed in a private theory.

But when Skip left, he had his own theory, and it made him hurt all over.

He went to a cafeteria across the street and tried to choke down some beef stew, but his appetite was gone. He used the pay phone to call Rosa, and was finally rewarded by her voice on the other end. He told her where he was, and asked her to sit still.

She must have taken him literally. When he arrived, she called out that the door was open. She was sitting in a chair at the kitchen table, a glass of tea cooling in front of her.

He told her all about Luis, but she seemed to know all about it, and didn't react. Then he asked her about the night of the shooting. "Didn't you think it was strange that your brother should have been arrested the same time your husband was killed?"

"I didn't know about it until later," Rosa said.

"Weren't you surprised about Luis? Your brother doesn't use drugs, does he?"

"No, never. But he's new to this country—he doesn't know what it's like around here, this neighborhood."

"He knew one thing, didn't he? That Mitch had moved out." She didn't answer. "I didn't know that myself until tonight. Mitch didn't talk much about his home life. Why did he move out, Rosa?"

She picked up the glass and sipped her tea, and Skip realized he was going to have to answer his own questions.

"I guess I should have noticed something myself," he said. "Mitch had somebody else, didn't he? Another woman?"

"I told him to move out," Rosa said flatly. "I gave him a choice, her or me. He took her."

"Was that when Luis showed up here? When he heard about it?" She didn't say no. "You wrote Luis a letter, and he showed up here, all upset about what was happening to his kid sister. He's your only family, isn't he? A brother and father both. He came here to straighten things out for you, didn't he, Rosa?"

"I told him not to," Rosa said. "He doesn't understand things, the way they are here."

"He tried to make Mitch drop this other woman, but Mitch wouldn't listen to him. So one night, he threatened him. That's probably all he meant to do. Only you don't go waving a gun in the face of a man like Mitch, he'll take it from you. That's what Mitch tried to do, and that's how he got killed. And Luis got scared, and ran into a house, and let himself get arrested as an alibi."

The door opened. Luis Madrid was in the kitchen before he realized his sister wasn't alone. Then he seemed to realize what was happening almost at once and turned to reverse direction. When Skip's hand dove for his service revolver, Luis grinned and said, "Hey, no sweat!" But then he was pulling open a kitchen drawer and Skip shouted at him to freeze. It proved a useful confrontation. The gun was in the drawer. Luis hadn't disposed of the weapon that killed Mitch Rodriguez—he didn't know the way things were done in this country.

She said she would be home all evening, and she was. When Skip arrived, Carmen Lopes was in the living room watching television. She turned it off when he entered.

"I thought you only looked at crystal balls," Skip said.

"Is it really true, what you said on the phone? Someone's been arrested?"

"Yes," Skip said. "Turns out it wasn't just some street psycho who killed Mitch. It was a domestic quarrel. But of course you knew that, didn't you? Your spooks told you."

"I don't remember saying anything like that."

"Don't be modest." He sat down without an invitation. "If it wasn't for what you said about Mitch's wife, I never would have followed up the lead. I mean, there wouldn't have been any reason. I knew Rosa was at home the night Mitch died. It never would have occurred to me that she and Mitch were having problems, that there was another woman."

"If I helped you in some way, I'm glad," Carmen said. But she didn't look any less mournful.

"Sure you helped me. You *wanted* to help the police from the beginning. Only it would have been very hard to come to us with your suspicion that Rosa Rodriguez had something to do with her husband's death— She didn't, by the way, not directly. It was her brother."

"Thank you for coming here," Carmen said. "I'm glad it's over. Now I'm a little tired."

"I want to know if you feel better about getting what you wanted. You had to put on an act, but you succeeded."

"It wasn't an act!"

"You just didn't want to tell me the truth—that you were Mitch's lady friend."

"That has nothing to do with it!"

"That's why you did such a good job on Mitch's voice. You really did sound like him, Carmen, but then you'd heard his voice often enough."

She fixed her dark eyes on his. "I didn't fake anything. What you heard, you heard. Everything I told you about myself is true. From the age of six, it's been true. What I felt for Mitch, what I thought about his death, that doesn't matter. What matters is, there are times when the dead talk through me."

Skip's vision blurred, and he realized his anger was returning. Even though it was all over, he felt anger at this woman and her smug mystical faith.

"All right," he said. "All right, I'm willing to believe it. I'm even willing to let you try again—if you would."

She was surprised. "Try again? To reach Mitch?"

"No," Skip said. "Mitch can rest in peace. I want to reach someone else—someone I've always wanted to talk to again. Someone I loved very much."

"Who?"

"My father."

Carmen stared at him. He put on a solemn expression. He almost managed to bring a film of tears to his eyes. He was impressed with his own performance, and she was, too.

"I don't know if I can."

"You said the—departed had to *want* to reach you. I think my father would. Very much. Could you at least try? Don't you think you owe me that much, Carmen?"

She hesitated, then walked to the light switch.

They sat in darkness for almost five minutes. Again he heard her breathing, again he was aware of the ticking of the clock.

Then Carmen groaned, and in the cover of the darkness Skip couldn't help a cynical smile.

It was a full minute later before the voice emerged from her throat—even more of a low-pitched whisper than the first time but surprisingly clear and audible and just as impassioned as it spoke his name, the name that Mitch must have mentioned to her. "*Skipper—Skipper—*"

"Is that you, Pop?" Skip asked in an appropriately hushed tone. "Is that you?"

"Skipper," the voice said with almost unbearable sadness, "take care of your mother. Take care of yourself."

"Yes, Pop," Skip said. "You can rest easy. I'll take care of Mom. You can count on me."

It had been a long time since he had actually looked forward to visiting the house in Stormville. He knew his parents would be surprised. They would assume he had come to share his triumph with them. It would be an added pleasure to be able to tell them the story of Carmen Lopes and her latest seance.

The house was almost dark when he arrived. His parents seemed to retire earlier and earlier.

When his mother came to the door, he expected her to be in her nightdress, but she was fully clothed. She came into his arms and embraced him in tears.

"I guess you heard the news," he said. "We've got the guy, finally. It's all over and done with."

She pulled away from him and searched his eyes. "That's why you came out?" she said. "Not because you heard?"

"Heard what?"

"I left a message on your machine to call me—so I could tell you. Skipper, your father passed away this morning in his sleep. So quiet I never knew." She opened her arms, and he went into that warm comforting circle—but felt cold, very very cold.



DETECTIVERSE

ANOTHER GRAVE TONE

by JAMES HOLDING

Here lies a loan shark, Angelo Dunn—
A cold-hearted fish if there ever was one.
He'd make you a loan with a friendly smile,
But after you'd owed him a little while
You'd find that no matter how hard you'd beg
His vigorish cost you an arm and a leg.
And then one night on a seaside vacation,
He chanced to encounter a close relation—
While taking a swim in the tropical dark,
He lost *his* legs to a tiger shark.

© 1989 by James Holding.

Sam's chopsticks stopped pounding out the rhythm track to Billy Joel's Greatest Hits. They hung motionless above the bowl of fried noodles he'd been using as a snare drum. This order the girl was taking down now could be the one . . .

TAKEOUT ORDER

by **CHARLES ARDAI**

When you're in a Chinese restaurant waiting for your food, there's nothing that passes the time like chopsticks. However, the entertainment you derive typically declines in relation to your age, the number of people at your table, how familiar those people are with chopsticks, and how long it's taking for your meal to be prepared.

By these criteria, Sam Chung Lao should already be bored. He was alone at his table, he had spent most of his twenty-three years using chopsticks, and he had ordered a complicated duck dish which would take at least another twenty minutes to prepare. Indeed, by these criteria he should have long since moved on to tipping the soy-sauce dispenser or pouring himself more bitter tea than he could ever care to drink.

But he hadn't. Sam was still toying with his chopsticks. Nervous energy moved his hands and preoccupied his mind, and his eyes burned with eager anticipation. The strange thing was that Sam wasn't hungry. He had no intention of eating the duck. In fact, he didn't even plan to be around when it came.

Sam had taken a table for two by the bar, had insisted on the very table he wanted. The waiter hadn't argued—it was rare that anyone volunteered to sit so near the triple distractions of the bar, the entryway, and the takeout counter. The first and second of these distractions Sam could certainly have done without, but the last was his sole reason for coming to Golden Wok East. He tried to be subtle about it, but anyone who had bothered to observe him would have seen in an instant that his attention was focused more on the young woman behind the counter and her constantly ringing telephone than on his own table.

© 1989 by Charles Ardaï.

"One beef fried rice," the woman said, repeating a telephone order, "one chicken lo mein, one beef with broccoli, two wonton soup. Your address?" She wrote, thanked, hung up, and passed the order efficiently to a young man who hurried it to the kitchen.

Sam had stopped paying attention after the lo mein. It was too large an order, no good for his purposes.

The phone rang again. "Takeout order. Yes—what would you like? Four lo mein, two shrimp, two vegetable—"

No good. None of these orders came close to suiting his needs. The more he waited, the more it looked as if he'd be stuck with his meal. The thought didn't please him, but there was no way he'd go with an order for more than one.

"Yes, we have free delivery. Beef with scallions. Yes, we can make it spicy. What else? That's it, one beef with scallions. Where is this going?"

Sam's chopsticks stopped pounding out the rhythm track to Billy Joel's Greatest Hits. They hung motionless above the bowl of fried noodles he'd been using as a snare drum. This could be the one. He listened closely.

"Louise Plimpton, three-forty-six East Fifty-seventh Street—Fifty-second Street, excuse me."

Sam set the chopsticks down next to the bowl and concentrated on firming up his plan. He needed a clear head. He tried to force the anxiety out of his mind. So far, everything was going like clockwork. He had found a Chinese restaurant in a moderately affluent neighborhood several miles from his own. He had cased it well and then gone home and made his preparations. Now he had returned and selected the table from which he could best overhear takeout orders being made. He had ordered the most intricate dish on the menu and added a request for an ingredient to be deleted so that they would not be able to give him one that had been preprepared.

And then he had waited coolly for a takeout order that would promise him success: a single dish, ordered by someone nearby, preferably a woman. Louise Plimpton's beef with scallions, to be delivered one block away, was perfect.

As calmly as he could, Sam pushed himself away from the table and collected his jacket from the chair on the other side. The jacket was slung loosely across a heavy paper bag, and Sam kept it that way. He walked over to the counter and told the takeout girl that his order was the duck, that he needed some air, and that he'd be

back before his food arrived. He told her this in Chinese, which added to her trust—which, of course, was how he had planned it. Besides, who had ever heard of a diner cutting out on his check *before* eating?

Outside and two buildings down Sam thought, Let the rest of the night go so well.

Inside his jacket, he had a little folded hat which he put on. He stepped into an unlit doorway, carefully set the paper bag down, and donned the jacket. It matched the hat. Over the left breast pocket, Sam had stitched the words *Golden Wok East*.

The next step was killing time. Louise Plimpton would be suspicious if her food arrived too soon after she ordered it. Sam double-checked the paper bag and its contents. The bag was a simple, medium-sized grocery sack to which Sam had stapled a receipt. The receipt was from the dinner he had eaten when he'd cased Golden Wok East two weeks before. It was for Mu-Shu pork, not beef with scallions, but since the order was scrawled in Chinese he doubted that it would matter. The bag held neither beef with scallions nor Mu-Shu pork but a loaded revolver, a pair of handcuffs, and a flat piece of cardboard to keep the bottom of the bag stiff.

Number three-forty-six was on the south side of the street. As Sam had expected, there was a doorman. Sam held the bag up. There was no better entry pass into the finest buildings in New York. "Louise Plimpton," he said.

The doorman ran a finger along a large grid of labeled pushbuttons, stopped at 7-D, pressed it, and lifted a receiver from the wall. "Chinese food delivery's here," he said. The reply was positive and he nodded, hung up, and waved Sam on toward the elevator. "Seven D," he told him.

Apartment D was at the end of the hall. The door was open, and a man was standing in the doorway in a bathrobe. A man? Sam started to panic. Louise Plimpton couldn't be a man. He forced his legs to carry him forward. It doesn't matter, he told himself. He's not a very big man, and not in great shape, either. And he has money in his hand. Besides, I have the gun.

Comforting as the thought of holding it in his hand was, Sam waited until he was only a few feet away before reaching into the bag and pulling out the gun. The look of shock on the man's face

was priceless. He backed into the apartment and Sam swiftly entered with him so that he couldn't close the door between them.

"Honey?" a woman's voice called. "How much was it?"

Honey had not yet found his voice. Sam prodded him with the gun and followed him from the entry hall to a kitchen.

A round butcher-block table and two chairs filled up most of what little space wasn't occupied by the refrigerator and stove. On the table were two plates and a lit candle. On one of the chairs was a woman in a slackly tied blue kimono. She did a double-take when Honey, and then Sam, came in. She started to her feet, pulling her kimono closed and belting it with trembling hands.

Sam waved the gun. The man and Louise backed up against the sink. Sam put the bag on the table and opened it. "One beef with scallions," he said. He took out the handcuffs and looked at them. He had been so sure that a single order of food would mean one person—one pair of handcuffs. Unfortunately, no good would come of backing out now. As long as he had shown his face, he had to see the job through. But how?

"You," he said, pointing at Honey. "What's your name?"

"Steve."

"Steve," Sam said, "come here." Steve advanced a few steps, a ten-dollar bill still clenched in his fist. Sam took the bill and pushed the cuffs at him. "Take these and cuff her right hand." Steve started to protest, but Sam's gun at his head stopped him. He took the handcuffs and Louise held out her arm. He clicked one cuff shut on her wrist.

"Put the other end on your left hand," Sam said. Steve took the cuff and cinched it around his left wrist.

Sam kept the gun up.

"Where's your money and your jewelry?" he asked. "Give them to me and I won't hurt you."

Louise nodded. "I'll give you whatever I have," she said.

Sam stepped back into the hall. "Lead the way. And don't try anything."

Louise and Steve moved awkwardly out of the kitchen and down the hall. There were two other rooms in the apartment, a bedroom and a bathroom. The bedroom was only a little larger than the kitchen, with just enough room for a twin bed, a dresser, and a bedside table. Sam directed Louise and Steve to sit on the bed. "Anything of any value is in the middle drawers," Louise volunteered.

There were two middle drawers. Sam looked in both. The first

held pantyhose and lingerie. In the other were nightgowns and a box filled with envelopes. The envelopes were marked with amounts of money they did not contain, such as one labeled FOOD: \$60.00, which held a five-dollar bill. Some of the envelopes were empty and none were thick, but Sam took them all. "Do you have any jewelry?" he asked.

"Not much. What I have is there," she said.

Sam searched around the drawers. Under a lacy slip he found a music box, which, when opened, played a lackluster version of "Feelings." The jewelry inside consisted of two pair of earrings, a thin gold neck chain, and a ring set with three small opals. Sam slid the jewelry into his pocket and left the box—still open and playing.

"Anything else?"

"Isn't that enough?" Louise asked. "You've got everything I have."

Sam turned to Steve. "You live here?"

"No."

As Sam started to respond, the housephone rang.

Sam cursed silently. He had taken too long and forgotten about the real delivery.

"Stay here," he told the couple. "If you move an inch, I'll kill you both." He ran out to the entry hall and pushed a black button by the door.

The doorman's voice spat from a grate above the button. "Takeout delivery here." Was it his imagination or did the doorman sound puzzled?

"Send him up," Sam said. He released the button, checked the bedroom—where Louise and Steve sat docilely on the bed, the tune on the music box winding down—and went to the door to wait, putting the gun in his pocket and taking out Steve's ten-dollar bill. Half a minute later, the elevator discharged a young man in sneakers, jeans, and a T-shirt, carrying a paper bag with a receipt and a takeout menu stapled on it. Sam shook his head. The guy wasn't even Chinese.

Sam gave him the money and took the bag, which was hot and oily and smelled pungently of scallions and garlic. "Keep the change," he told him.

"Thanks." The young man took the money from Sam and crammed it into his jeans. "Can I use your phone?" he asked.

"Sorry," Sam said. "It's out of order."

The young man nodded—"Thanks, anyway"—and walked back to the elevator. Sam closed and locked the door, disgusted with himself.

How could the phone be out of service if he'd just called out for the order?

He left the bag on the kitchen table and returned to the bedroom, the gun in his hand again. "Where's your wallet?" he asked Steve.

"It's on—" Steve began, but the housephone rang again.

"What's going on?" Sam said with disgust. "Don't move." He ran out and jabbed the button.

"Ribs," the doorman said. "From Kiley's."

"What?"

"You ordered ribs? They're here."

What was this? "Send it up." Great, Sam thought, three delivery men in one night, one of whom never came down. He paced. Half a minute later, the doorbell rang.

It was spareribs, all right, a great, steaming tin tray of them. Sam opened the FOOD envelope and passed over the five, then another five from an envelope marked RENT. The delivery man took both and waited for more. Sam studied the bill, gritted his teeth, and passed over another ten-dollar bill, from his own pocket. The man smiled, offered no change, and left.

So they *had* ordered two dishes after all. Sam started to dig through the remaining envelopes to recoup his investment when he heard, from the bedroom, a sound he recognized as the standard, shrill your-telephone-is-off-the-hook recording.

"Oh, no," he said. He ran to the bedroom. Louise and Steve were sitting on the bed, but over by the bedside phone now. The receiver was back in place and the signal had stopped.

"Oh, no," Sam said again. "Did you call anyone?" Neither Louise nor Steve spoke, but their eyes seemed to mock him.

The doorbell rang. Sam stared at them. Could it be a neighbor? Or maybe it was the delivery boy from Kiley's back to offer him change. Even if they had called the police, this would be too quick a response. Glaring them a warning, he backed into the hall and opened the door.

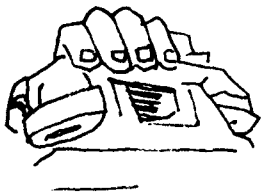
Two police officers stood facing him, their guns drawn, behind them the delivery man from Golden Wok East. Too late, Sam tried to hide his gun and slam the door, but one of the officers stopped him. "I'll take the gun," he said.

The other policeman turned to the young delivery man. "Is this the man?"

"Yes," the young man said. "I don't know who he is, but he doesn't work at the Golden Wok."

The jacket! How stupid could he be? He had accepted a delivery from Golden Wok East in a phony Golden Wok East jacket. The young man must have known something was wrong right away. And when Sam had told him the phone wasn't working, he'd been convinced enough to go to the police.

"You have the right to remain silent—" the policeman who had taken Sam's gun began.



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a **NEW Black Widowers** story by

ISAAC ASIMOV

Having torn open the envelope, MacShannon's neighbor extracted the letter, unfolded it, read it without the slightest expression on his face, then crumpled it and tossed it into the trash basket that stood by the elevators in the hall. He then, still without expression, placed the empty envelope inside his inner jacket pocket. He did it very carefully and patted the front of his jacket as though to assure himself it was well seated.

"How did you know it was an empty envelope?" Trumbull asked Mario Gonzalo's guest. "There could have been an enclosure along with the letter. A check, for instance . . ."

THE ENVELOPE

by **ISAAC ASIMOV**

Emmanuel Rubin arrived at the Black Widowers banquet in a foul mood. This was not much worse than his usual attitude, to be sure, but his eyes, magnified behind the thick lenses of his spectacles, flashed dangerously.

"Uh-oh," said Mario Gonzalo, host of the occasion, "someone has received a well deserved rejection."

"I have *not* received a rejection," snapped Rubin, "well deserved or otherwise. It's much worse than that."

Geoffrey Avalon stared down from his 74-inch height at the diminutive Rubin and said in his stately baritone, "Much worse than a rejection? For a free-lance writer like you, Manny? Come now."

"Listen," said Rubin furiously, "I walked into the local post office this morning and asked for a roll of twenty-five-cent stamps. That irks me to begin with. I can remember when it cost two cents to mail

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a letter, but the price keeps going up and up without seeming to effect the eternal deficit—”

“At least,” said Roger Halsted, “the service gets worse to balance the increase in rates.”

“You say that because you think it’s funny, Roger,” said Rubin, “but you happen to be dead right. —Thank you, Henry.”

Henry, the unsurpassable waiter of the Black Widower banquets, recognizing the demands being made on Rubin by his passion, had brought him a refill of his drink.

James Drake, lighting his perennial cigarette, said, “I remember when stamps were two cents, too, and the morning newspaper was two cents, and a pack of cigarettes was thirteen cents—and my weekly salary was fifteen dollars. So what?”

“I haven’t finished,” said Rubin. “So I asked for a roll of twenty-five-cent stamps and the confounded idiot at the window looked me right in the eye and said, ‘We don’t have any.’ I was stunned. It was a post office, damn it. I said, ‘Why not?’ And he just shrugged and shouted, ‘Next!’ I mean, no sign of regret or embarrassment. They might have put up a sign to say the rolls were temporarily out. I had to wait half an hour in line to be told I couldn’t have one.”

Gonzalo said, “Suppose we cool you down to your usual state of semi-sanity, Manny, so that I can introduce my guest—Francis MacShannon. He’s a good friend of mine.”

Rubin shook hands loftily. “Any good friend of Mario’s, Mr. MacShannon, is highly suspect in my eyes.”

“Which is what you’d expect,” said Gonzalo, “from someone who falls into a tirade over a roll of stamps. —I’ll give you a few to tide you over, Manny. No charge.”

“No, thanks,” said Rubin. “I got my roll later in the day. It’s a matter of principle.”

“I apologize for Manny’s dubious principles, Frank,” said Gonzalo. “He makes one up whenever he can’t get his way.”

Francis MacShannon laughed. He appeared sixtyish, with a round and jolly face above a short, plump body. He had a ruddy complexion and a grey chin-beard, giving him the appearance of a semi-shaven Santa Claus.

“I’m on your side, Mr. Rubin,” he said, in a high-pitched voice that rather spoiled the Santa Claus image. “I have complaints about the post office, too.”

“Doesn’t everyone?” growled Thomas Trumbull, who had arrived a moment before and now seized upon the scotch and soda Henry

held out for him. There was a pause while MacShannon was introduced and then he said, "My own complaint is with the matter of postmarks. Nowadays they are only dirty smudges, but when I was young postmarks were legible and beautifully clear. They were geography lessons. In fact, I built up a huge collection of postmarks."

Avalon's formidable eyebrows raised. "How does one do that, Mr. MacShannon?"

"To begin with, my parents gave me the envelopes they received in the mail. So did the neighbors up and down the street, once they learned how serious I was about it. The best part of it, though, was finding discarded envelopes in the street, in back yards, under bushes. You'd be surprised how many envelopes it was possible to find. Each new postmark I'd never before encountered was a treasure and I'd look it up carefully in the atlas. I made lists of them by states and nations and pasted the envelopes into notebooks in organized fashion. I became an aficionado of envelopes such as you could scarcely imagine. In fact, it was my interest in envelopes that led to my—"

It was at this point that Henry's softly authoritative voice said, "Dinner is served, gentlemen."

They sat down to their melon-prosciutto, followed by cream-of-asparagus soup, and a mixed green salad. The conversation dealt with the new Russian probe designed to study the Martian satellite, Phobos, and over the roast capon the discussion grew heated over whether a joint Soviet-American Mars expedition was desirable or not. The post office and its manifold sins dwindled and vanished in the fire of the new controversy. Down went the chocolate almond pie and the coffee and, over the brandy, Gonzalo called for the grilling.

"Manny," he said, "you be the griller—and I invoke host's privilege and tell you that the subject of the post office must not be mentioned."

Rubin scowled and said, "Mr. MacShannon, how do you justify your existence?"

MacShannon said amiably, "I'm a computer programmer and designer. These days I think that speaks for itself."

"Maybe," said Rubin. "We might get back to that later. Obviously your present labors have nothing to do with your activities as a child—I mean your postmark collection. You'd said—"

"Manny," said Gonzalo abruptly, "I ruled out the post office."

"Fire and brimstone!" exploded Rubin. "Who's talking post office? I'm talking postmark collection. I appeal to the membership."

"All right. Go ahead," said Gonzalo resignedly.

"Now, then," said Rubin after an unnecessarily protracted glare at Gonzalo, "when dinner was announced you were saying it was your interest in envelopes that led to something. I'd like to have the sentence finished. What did your interest in envelopes lead to?"

MacShannon frowned thoughtfully. "Did I say that?" Then his brow cleared and a look of almost comic self-satisfaction crossed his face. "Oh, yes, of course. Back in nineteen fifty-three, it was through my interest in envelopes that I caught a spy. A real honest-to-Pete spy."

"In 'fifty-three?" said Avalon, frowning. "Don't tell me you were one of the young men working for Senator Joseph McCarthy?"

"Who? Me?" said MacShannon, clearly astonished at the suggestion. "Never! I never had any use for McCarthy at all." He pondered the matter a moment. "Of course, he did make the nation spy-conscious and traitor-conscious, and that couldn't help but affect me, I suppose. You couldn't help thinking in that direction even if you disapproved of McCarthy's tactics, as I did."

"National paranoia, I call it," said Rubin seriously.

"Maybe," said MacShannon, "but whatever you call it, I suppose that's what put the whole melodrama in my mind. In a quieter, less frenetic time, I would have seen that envelope and never given it a thought."

"Tell us about it," said Rubin.

"Certainly, if you wish. After thirty-six years, it can't be sensitive. Besides, I don't know the details, only the general outline. I was just starting out in the world, had my engineering degree, had a small job, was living by myself for the first time. I was twenty-four years old, though, and still a little uncertain of myself.

"There was another man living alone across the hall from me—Benham was his name. I don't remember his first name. He was about thirty, I think, and I would occasionally see him going in or out. He was a scowler, if you know what I mean—unfriendly, never addressed me. I said hello once or twice in passing, but he'd give me the curtest possible nod and froze me with his expression. I grew to dislike him intensely, of course, and since I was a great reader of thrillers in those days, I fantasied that he was something villainous—a criminal, a hitman, or, best of all, a spy.

"Then, one day as we were both waiting for an elevator to take

us to our apartments on the eighth floor he tore open an envelope he was holding, which I assumed he'd just picked up from his letter-box. I had checked mine earlier and it was empty—as it almost always was in those days, except when my mother wrote me. I watched my neighbor out of the corner of my eye, partly because I would naturally watch someone I was fantasizing to be a mysterious villain, partly because I envied anyone who got a letter, and even partly because I never quite got over my childhood fascination with envelopes.

"Having torn open the envelope, he extracted the letter, unfolded it, read it without the slightest expression on his face, then crumpled it and tossed it into the trash basket that stood by the elevators in the hall. He then, still without expression, placed the empty envelope inside his inner jacket pocket. He did it very carefully and patted the front of his jacket as though to assure himself it was well seated."

Trumbull interrupted. "How did you know it was an empty envelope? There could have been an enclosure along with the letter. A check, for instance."

MacShannon shook his head amiably. "I told you I had this quasi-professional attitude concerning envelopes. It was a flimsy kind, semi-transparent. He had held it in the hand near me while he scanned the letter and I could tell it was empty. No mistake was possible."

"Odd," said Halsted.

"The odd thing about it," said MacShannon, "was that at first I *didn't* think it was odd. After all, people frequently discard envelopes and keep letters, but I had never seen anyone discard a letter and keep an empty envelope. And yet I didn't think it was odd. I said to myself, Gee, he's collecting postmarks, and for a moment I was a ten-year-old again and remembering the thrill of the chase. In fact, for a little while I recognized this Benham as a fellow postmarker and I could feel myself warming to him.

"Maybe it was just as well, for if I hadn't had the postmark thought I might not have kept the envelope in mind. But I did keep it in mind, and by the time I reached the eighth floor I had other thoughts. As usual, my neighbor hadn't addressed a word to me, or cast me a glance, and my heart hardened toward him again. He couldn't be a postmarker, I decided, because postmarks had already deteriorated past the point where collecting could be profitable. Already one never saw a clear postmark except on the occasional commemorative envelope.

"Why, then, did he save the envelope? It took me only ten seconds to convert the matter into a spy thriller, and I had it. He had received a casual, meaningless message anyone could see and dismiss, but the *real* message was on the envelope where no one would look for it, and which he therefore kept for later study.

"By the time I'd thought of that, I was in my apartment. I waited there for about half a minute, then peered out into the hall to make sure my neighbor wasn't lingering there. He wasn't, so I got back into the elevator, went down to the lobby, and retrieved the crumpled letter."

Rubin said, "Which, I suppose, turned out to be completely uninteresting."

"Well," said MacShannon. "At least it seemed to show Benham in a more human light. The letter was in a feminine handwriting, but by no means a cultivated one—a semi-legible scrawl."

Avalon said, with a sigh, "That is about the best you can expect in these degenerate days."

MacShannon smiled. "I suppose so. In any case, I studied that letter so closely over the next few days that I still remember it thirty-six years later. Not that there was much to remember. It wasn't dated and it just started, 'Dear Mr. Benham, I had a very good time and it was kind of you to promise to check the matter of the job-opening. Please let me know, and thank you.'"

"I see what you mean," said Halsted. "This neighbor might freeze you out, but his female correspondent thought him a kindly man."

Trumbull said, "Many a curmudgeon will unbend to a young woman to achieve the usual end."

MacShannon said, "I didn't think of anything like that. All it seemed to me was that the letter seemed totally innocuous, as I had thought it would have to be. The whole thing about job-openings and kindness might just be a matter of writing at random, so to speak. To me, it meant that the envelope was all the more likely to be the important item. The question was, what ought I to do about it? I dithered for several days, and then finally took action. —Please remember that I was young and naive in those days, because in the end I went to the local office of the F.B.I."

Drake smiled and fingered the ashtray before him. "You risked making a fool of yourself."

"Even I knew that much," said MacShannon. "In fact, I remember that as I told my story to an apparently politely bored functionary, I felt more and more foolish as I sounded less and less convincing

in my own ears. I had several things on my side, though. Senator McCarthy had made it impossible for any agent to ignore any tale of spies. After all, it would be his neck if he let one go that he should not have."

"I can see that," said Halsted. "An agent dismissing something wrongfully would probably be accused of being a spy himself, or a card-carrying member of the Communist party."

"Yes," said MacShannon. "The F.B.I. has to investigate anything brought to it even in easygoing times, but at the height of the McCarthy mania—Then, too, it turned out that Benham, this neighbor of mine, had a post in the infant computer industry and was in a position to know a few things the Pentagon distinctly wanted to have kept secret. In fact, it was my eventual understanding of this that roused my own interest in computers, so that in a sense I owe my present career to Benham. In any case, I was listened to and the letter was taken from me. I was given a receipt, even though it wasn't my letter."

"In a way, I entered into a distant partnership with the F.B.I. I was asked to keep an eye on Benham and report anything further I thought unusual or suspicious. It made a common spy out of me, which, looking back on it, makes me feel a little awkward, but I honestly thought I might be dealing with an enemy agent, and I was a bit of a romantic in those days."

"And you might have been infected by the times," said Avalon.

"I wouldn't be surprised," said MacShannon agreeably. "At the time, of course, I didn't know exactly what the F.B.I. was doing, but eventually I became friendly with the agent I had first spoken to, especially as it slowly turned out that Benham was indeed more than he seemed, so that the agent couldn't help but think highly of me."

Rubin said, "Then the hidden envelope turned out to be important, I suppose."

"Let me tell you how things worked out in order," said MacShannon. "They investigated the letter I gave them for some sort of code. What seemed non-significant to me might contain a hidden meaning. They could find none. Nor could they find hidden writing, or anything technically advanced, and that just made my story the more persuasive, since I had stressed the importance of the envelope from the beginning."

"They took to intercepting Benham's mail and opening it, reading it, resealing it, and sending it on. I watched the process on one

occasion and it gave me a grisly feeling. It seemed so unAmerican. There was no way of telling that the letter had been opened or in any way tampered with, and I've never been able to trust my own mail entirely since then. Who knows who might be studying it without my knowledge?"

Rubin said drily, "For that matter, phone calls can be listened to, rooms can be bugged, conversations in the open can be overheard. We live in a world devoid of privacy."

MacShannon nodded and continued. "They were particularly interested in any letters that Benham got from the young woman whose letter I had picked up. These had their own points of interest to a nosybody, for, as I was eventually told by my friend the agent, it was plain that there was a burgeoning love affair going on there. The woman's letters grew more impassioned and devoted, but they were always scrawled, brief, and continued to show no great intellectual capacity."

Drake grinned. "Intellectual capacity is not necessarily what a man might be after."

Halsted asked, "How long did the investigation go on?"

"Months," said MacShannon. "It was an on-and-off affair."

"Say," said Gonzalo, "if this was a love affair, the letter might not be significant in any case. If agents are in the business of collecting and transmitting information, they're not going to fall in love."

"Why not?" said Avalon sententiously. "Love comes as it pleases, sometimes to the most unlikely participants in the most unlikely situations. That's why Eros is often pictured as blind."

"That's not what I mean," said Gonzalo. "Of course, they can fall in love, but they wouldn't use their official communications, if I may call them that, as a vehicle. They'd make love on their own time, so to speak, in their own way, and leave the important messages alone."

MacShannon said, "Not if the real messages were on the envelope. The more immaterial the letter itself, the better. Why not carry on a love affair, even a sincere love affair, in the letter itself? Who would think of looking at the envelopes in cases where the letter itself seems so all-important to the writer and reader? If I hadn't seen him save that first envelope—"

"Well," said Trumbull a little impatiently, "get on with it. I have some connection with counter-intelligence myself and I'm sure they investigated the envelopes."

"They did indeed," said MacShannon. "Every one of them, whether

they were from the young lady or not. At least, the agent told me they did, and I had no reason to think he was lying. Of course, I wondered at the time if what they were doing was legal."

"Undoubtedly it was illegal," said Trumbull. "They had no evidence of wrongdoing. Saving an empty envelope may be puzzling but it's not a crime. Still, national security purifies a multitude of sins and a bit of illegality here and there is winked at."

"Bad in principle," growled Rubin. "A bit of illegality leads to a lot, and in no time we'd be at the Gestapo level."

"We aren't yet," said Trumbull, "and there's a tight rein placed on these organizations."

"Yes, when they're caught," said Rubin.

"And they're caught often enough to be kept within bounds. Come on, Manny, let's let MacShannon proceed. You were telling us they inspected the envelopes."

"Yes," said MacShannon. "They removed the stamps to see what might be underneath. They studied every bit of writing on the envelope to the last detail and they subjected the paper to every known test. They even substituted new envelopes which they made just like the old except that they made small, non-significant changes. They wanted to see if the new envelope had something distorted that would reduce its message to nonsense."

Drake said, "That's a lot of trouble to take for anything as thin as your story."

"You can thank McCarthy for that," said MacShannon. "But they never did find anything either in the letters or on the envelopes."

Rubin said, "Hold on, Mr. MacShannon, when you started this story you said that as a result of your interest in envelopes you caught an honest-to-Pete spy. Did you or didn't you?"

"I did," said MacShannon urgently. "I *did*."

"Are you going to tell us," said Rubin, "that as a result of the investigation a different person altogether was trapped as the spy?"

"No, no. It *was* Benham."

"But you said the letters and the envelopes showed nothing."

"I didn't quite say they showed nothing. I said the F.B.I. found nothing in the correspondence. However, they didn't confine themselves to that. They worked at the other end—his job. They inspected his work record, kept him under hidden surveillance, and eventually found out what he was doing and with whom. I gathered that quite a substantial spy ring was broken and I got some nice words from the Bureau. Nothing official, of course, but it was the big excitement

of my life and I owed it all, in a way, to my having collected postmarks as a boy."

There was perhaps less satisfaction on the faces of the assembled Black Widowers than there was on MacShannon's.

Avalon said, "What about the young woman? Benham's light o' love? Was she picked up, too?"

For a moment MacShannon looked uncertain. "I'm not dead sure," he said. "I was never told. My impression at the time was that there was insufficient evidence in her case, since they got nothing out of the letters or envelopes. —But that's the one thing that bothers me. I got Benham because he had saved that envelope. Why couldn't they find anything on the envelopes, then? If Benham and company had some secret communication system that the F.B.I. didn't penetrate, who knows what damage has been done since then by its means."

Halsted said, "Maybe the F.B.I. found nothing on the envelopes because there was nothing to find there. Even spies can't be spies every minute of the day. Maybe the love affair was only a love affair."

MacShannon's good humor began to evaporate. He looked a little grim as he said, "But then why did he save that envelope? It always comes down to that. We're not talking about an ordinary person, but about a real spy. Why should he discard a letter so casually that anyone could pick it up and save an empty envelope? There has to be a reason. If there's an innocent reason that has nothing to do with his profession, what is it?"

Avalon said gently, "I take it that you yourself have never thought of an adequate reason, Mr. MacShannon?"

"None, except that the envelope bore a message of some sort."

"I suspect," said Rubin, "that you haven't tried thinking of what we have been calling an innocent explanation. Perhaps you've been too satisfied with your message theory."

"In that case, *you* think of an alternate reason, Mr. Rubin," said MacShannon defiantly.

"Now wait," said Halsted, "the spy thing was *not* Mr. MacShannon's original assumption. At first he thought that Benham was collecting postmarks—or possibly stamps, for that matter. Suppose that very first thought was correct."

MacShannon said, "Don't underestimate the F.B.I. I had mentioned my original thought and on one occasion they managed to search his apartment. There were no signs of any collecting mania

of any kind. Certainly there were no envelope collections. They told me so."

"You might have told us that," said Rubin.

"I just have," said MacShannon, "but it's not important. The chances of his saving the envelope for collecting purposes was so small that it made no sense to dwell on it."

Drake said, "It could have been a thoughtless action. People do all sorts of silly things out of distraction or habit. Your Mr. Benham meant to save the letter and discard the envelope, and without thinking he did the reverse."

"I can't believe that," said MacShannon.

"Why not? It's called being absent-minded," said Drake. "Later, when he found he had saved the envelope, he may have gone downstairs to recover the letter and found it gone."

MacShannon said, "A man whose career is espionage is surely not absent-minded. He wouldn't last long if he were. Besides, he knew what he was doing. He read the letter and crumpled it at once and discarded it. Then he looked at the envelope thoughtfully and put it away carefully. He knew what he was doing."

"Are you sure?" said Drake. "It happened thirty-six years ago. With all due respect, you may be honestly remembering what you want to remember."

"Not at all," said MacShannon frigidly. "It was the big excitement of my life and I spent a lot of time thinking about it. My memory is accurate."

Drake shrugged. "If you insist, it's impossible to argue, of course."

MacShannon looked about the table from face to face. "Now, then, who has an alternate explanation? No collection. No absent-mindedness. And no sentimental attachment for the writer. There might have been a love affair afterward, but that letter Benham discarded was clearly the first one he had received. He had just met her. And even if it was love at first sight, something he didn't strike me as subject to, he would have kept the letter, not the envelope."

There was silence around the table and MacShannon said, "There you are! It's bothered me for all these years. I guess I'll just have to keep on wondering for the rest of my life."

"Wait," said Avalon. "The communication, if there was indeed one, may have been on the first envelope only, the one he saved and the one the F.B.I. presumably never saw. All the others may have been clean and irrelevant."

MacShannon's little beard quivered at that. "I'll leave it to Mr.

Trumbull," he said. "He said he was with counter-intelligence. Does a conspirator of some sort give up a method of communication once it has been proven successful?"

Trumbull said, "It's not a cosmic law, but successful gambits aren't lightly abandoned. However, it might no longer have been particularly successful. That envelope he kept may have happened to be the last of a line using a technique that had grown risky."

"Might, may have," said MacShannon. "We have two actual facts. The man *was* a spy. The man *did* keep an empty envelope. I'm looking for an explanation as to why a spy should keep an empty envelope, an explanation that isn't pure speculation."

Again there was silence about the table. MacShannon smiled sardonically and said, "There is no such explanation, except that that envelope bore a message."

At this point, Henry, from his post at the sideboard, said mildly, "May I offer a suggestion?"

MacShannon whirled at this unexpected entry into the conversation and said, "What is it you want, waiter?"

Gonzalo immediately held up his hand in a stop-gesture and said, "Henry is a member of the club, Frank. He's expected to contribute."

"I see," said MacShannon, without any noticeable easing of his manner. "What is it you wish to say, then, my man?"

"Only, sir, that saving an empty envelope is something so reasonable that any of us might do it, and that each of us may in fact have done at some time or another."

"I deny that," said MacShannon.

"Consider, sir," said Henry quietly, "that the letter you obtained from the trashcan was, as you yourself have said, the first between them. They had been out together on a date, or perhaps as the result of a casual meeting. They talked. She told him of her difficulties in locating a suitable job and he offered to help her. Since he was not an agreeable character from your description of him, Mr. MacShannon, he must have been attracted to her and strove to be agreeable against his natural bent. We don't know if she was young and pretty, but that's a reasonable assumption. She must have been attracted to him, too. Certainly the letter expressed gratitude and encouraged a continuation of the correspondence. She said, 'Please let me know,' and, in fact, there *was* further correspondence and there is apparently no question but that a certain romance eventually began between them. Would you judge me correct in all this?"

"Yes," said MacShannon, "but what of it?"

"We might further reason," said Henry, "that Mr. Benham would want to continue the correspondence with a woman who may have been young and pretty and was certainly being grateful and inviting. Now, you told us the contents of the letter, Mr. MacShannon, and said you remembered it word for word. It was the letter of a pleasant but not well organized young woman, for you said it was undated, and almost anyone with any sense of order dates a letter."

"Yes," said MacShannon, "it was undated. But I still don't get what you're driving at."

Henry said, "Someone casual enough to leave a letter undated may well have omitted other things as well. You said it started with 'Dear Mr. Benham.' I take it then that there was no return address included on the letter."

MacShannon's frown smoothed out and he said, with a note of surprise, "No, there wasn't."

"Then," said Henry, "since the letter wasn't a love letter and Benham was not the type, perhaps, to place even a love letter next to his heart, he crumpled it and threw it away. However, he did want to answer it and perhaps encourage a relationship he suspected might be sexually satisfying. People who don't put the return address on the letter itself often do place it on the envelope. And the woman would want to be sure he had her address. So Mr. Benham looked at the envelope, noted that it carried the return address, and saved it so that he could answer the young lady. Surely that is a reasonable explanation."

A wave of brief applause swept the table, and Henry, flushing slightly, said, "Thank you, gentlemen."

MacShannon, clearly taken aback, said, "But in that case the envelope had nothing to do with Benham's espionage."

"As Mr. Halsted said earlier," said Henry, "a spy needn't be a spy every second. There are bound to be intervals of normality. However, he did break a cardinal rule of the profession, I think."

"What was that, Henry?" asked Trumbull.

"It seems to me that anyone engaged in the difficult profession of espionage must, above all, refrain from attracting attention of any kind. The envelope should not have been saved and the letter discarded in front of a witness. It should not even have been opened and read in front of a witness. —Of course, Mr. Benham had no way of knowing that the young man he always studiously ignored had once collected postmarks and was therefore sensitized to envelopes."

a **NEW** short story by

DOROTHY HUNT SCHOFIELD

"You ever let me catch you on those tracks," her mother had said to Lucia, her face furious, "and woe be unto you!"

Dorothy Hunt Schofield has been writing since she was ten. She has had four short stories and a poem published in The New Yorker, a story in Seventeen, poems in The Saturday Evening Post, and non-fiction in Yankee. This is her first offering to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. We hope for more for you . . .

ONE DAY IN AUGUST

by **DOROTHY HUNT SCHOFIELD**

At the very edge of the beach the water looked like a strip of cellophane, or a bit of blue ocean that had faded under too much sun. Lucia knelt there, her dark head bent, and watched the tiny creatures flit over the sand, the infinitesimal shrimps and minnows and crabs. Once when she had been small—two years ago when she was five—she had gathered these little sea beings in a glass jar and taken them home to set on the back porch. She had wanted them for pets, but they had died in the hot sun and the dead smell of them had made her mother forbid her to ever bring them home again. It was better, anyway, to watch them alive and free in the water at the edge of the beach. Only rarely did Lucia poke out her finger and disturb them so that like lightning they disappeared, and only very cautiously, a long while later, came back.

She became aware of someone else on the beach and slowly looked around, her squinting black eyes turned toward the seawall. On it stood two little girls in white dresses, their hair long and golden and so well brushed that each hair lay straight beside the other, like the painted hair of children in portraits. For a long moment the three

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regarded one another. Lucia knew who they were: they were the new kids who had moved into Mr. Furness's bungalow. They were summer people, here for the month of August. They had come up from New York. She stood up, wiping her hands down the sides of her sun-faded blue shorts.

"I'll play with ya?" she said, making it a half question.

The girls continued to regard her. The elder one, who was about eight, was holding the hand of her sister, perhaps two years younger. The smaller child smiled tentatively, but the other's face remained impassive. "We're not allowed," she said. Her voice was sweet, clear, and flat.

Lucia dug her toes into the sand. Or rather they dug in by themselves, without any order from her. She put her head a little to one side, feeling the skin about her eyes tighten as her gaze narrowed. She wasn't quite sure what "we're not allowed" meant—she had never heard the expression before. It had a grown-up sound that she instinctively mistrusted, but she swept it aside as the desire to have these beautiful little girls for playmates became strong and eager.

She walked toward the seawall. "I could take you out in the dinghy if you want, and we could row around," she said, smiling up into the sun at them.

The older girl looked down at her dispassionately. "We can't play with you," she said shortly. "You're poor and you live in a shack and your father's a lobsterman."

Lucia's lips parted a little. She stood very still in the sun, looking at them. They wore short socks of some material that seemed to glisten, and their white sneakers with the blue bindings were new and starched-looking. The skin of their thin legs was as white as milk. She caught the smell of their clothing, a smell of ironing-board and a light perfume.

"And, besides, you're a Portugee," said the other girl. She raised a slim white hand and slowly brushed a strand of hair back from her cheek.

Lucia cried out, "I'm *not* a Portugee!" Her neck, held back, felt stiff and strained. "I am not either a Portugee!"

For the first time, the older girl smiled. "You look like one. You're as black as one."

Lucia clenched her hands. "I'm not! I'm not!" she said huskily, blinking fast. "I'm Lucia Wickham. Manuel *Silva's* a Portugee—*him*." She pointed down the beach to the boatyard where a man in blue

overalls worked on a boat under the quivering heat waves. The little girls looked at him casually, returning their eyes to Lucia.

"Anyway," said the eldest, swinging her sister's hand idly back and forth, "we have to go to the post office to get our mother's mail." She turned toward the slope that led up to the railroad tracks.

When they were halfway up the slope, the smaller girl turned and called down to Lucia, "Your father's nothing but an old lobsterman!" Giggling, the two climbed up through the scrub pines and blueberry bushes until they reached the tracks.

Lucia watched them until they disappeared, their bodies growing shorter and shorter as they walked along the ties, until only their heads showed, and then nothing. They were gone along the railroad tracks that meandered between scrub pines and berry bushes from Buzzards Bay to Woods Hole.

She looked down at her bare toes, half sunk in the wet sand. She felt the hot sun burning her bare back. Abruptly she shoved out her arm and stared at it. It was very brown, but not brown like Manuel's; it was only this deep-brown color during the summer, when she wore nothing but old shorts and sleeveless tops. She thought of the little girls' bright white dresses and their shiny socks and new sneakers. She remembered the sweet smell of them. Lifting her arm, she pressed it to her nose and sniffed. It had a dry, salty smell. She stuck out her tongue and lapped the skin—it tasted like seaweed.

Suddenly she sprang up onto the seawall and began to hurry toward the slope, clambering up through the prickly bushes, her bare quick feet dislodging small stones and dirt. Her mother didn't let her walk on the railroad tracks, and she never did—she didn't want to be squashed flat, with blood squirting out of her, as her mother had promised she would be if she caught her foot in the ties and couldn't get it loose and a train came along and ran over her.

"You ever let me catch you on those tracks," her mother had said, her face furious, "and *woe be unto you!*" So Lucia didn't go onto the tracks, but lay on her stomach at the top of the slope and looked down the glistening rails at the two girls far away, their figures tiny and blurred in the heat. She lay there with her eyes half closed, her cheek on her folded arms, and whispered, "We're *not* poor, and I'm *not* a Portugee." Under her chest little ants moved and dirt shifted. A bug or a butterfly lit on her back for a moment, but she didn't wriggle to make it go away. She lay quietly on the warm earth and stared down the tracks at the girls. "It's not either a shack," she said aloud.

Presently she lifted her head and squirmed forward a little, to see their faroff figures better. They had stopped; their white dresses, brilliant in the distance, were growing no smaller. They hadn't reached the post office yet—the post office was almost a mile down the tracks and when they reached it she would no longer be able to see them. Lucia narrowed her eyes so that things became sharp and water-clear. She could now see that they were moving, but not forward. They were bending over, making motions as though they were trying to lift something up from the ground, from between the ties. After a moment, Lucia turned around and began to slide carefully down the slope where the warm dirt lay scuffed and soft between the bushes and little trees.

She walked back along the seawall, feeling the hot concrete under her feet, her hands in the pockets of her shorts, her head lowered. She could hear Manuel hammering on the boat, the blows echoing over the water. At the end of the seawall, Lucia stopped, seeing the woman who stood there with her hand shading her eyes, staring down the beach. She wore blue slacks and a yellow shirt, and her blonde hair was bound around her head in braids.

"Little girl," she said urgently when she noticed Lucia standing above her on the seawall, "have you seen two children here on the beach this morning? Two little girls?"

"Yes," said Lucia.

"Do you know where they are—where they went?" She addressed Lucia absently, as though she were not actually aware of her as what she was, but only an instrument through which she might allay her anxiety.

Lucia pointed. "They went down the tracks to the post office," she said.

At that moment she heard the train and its piercing whistle. She brought her pointing hand back, lifted her other, and clapped both to her ears. She stood there, her lips drawn back, her eyes shut so tightly that the lashes were almost lost between the lids, and tried to shut out the sound of the train's whistle. Which was strange, for she had always lived within the sound of its cry and it had never bothered her before.

a **NEW Baytown** story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

Carlisle could not forget vaudeville. It had been on its last legs in Montreal when he was getting started in advertising. So when he drove to Baytown for a visit and was told the old Bay Cinema was to be demolished, the idea struck him like a meteor. He would buy the building and preserve it, musty seats, ancient stage, orchestra pit, and all. Close the projection booth, remove the silver screen. Banish the Hollywood ghosts in favor of performers risking their souls by appearing live in front of a fickle crowd . . .

THE BAYTOWN FOLLIES

by **WILLIAM BANKIER**

Cootie Carlisle was experiencing mixed feelings. Sitting by himself in the empty theater, listening to Annalisa Morelli Hogan rehearsing "The Baytown Rhapsody," he suddenly knew the project was going to succeed. Which meant his 32-year marriage to Sylvia, holding out back in Toronto, might be over.

Annalisa looked magnificent on stage. She was forty pounds overweight—but the Mediterranean beauty that had once carried her to the finals of the Miss Canada competition was radiating across the footlights. In the orchestra pit, Jimmy Morelli was conducting his composition with flamboyant gestures. Trumpet, saxophone, and drums racketed to a tinny climax. Annalisa's rich contralto soared through the concluding stanza.

"From East Hill to West Hill,
We raise our voices high—
Baytown, my Baytown,
I'll love you till I die!"

Carlisle clapped his hands and cheered, but Jimmy Morelli was

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less enthusiastic. "The opening needs work," he said. Now that he was no longer conducting, Morelli became his usual self, the alcoholic sign painter whose trembling hands firmed up only when he extended a brushful of color to a lettered surface. "Let's take it from the top."

His daughter headed for the wings, her flowered caftan flowing after her. "If I have to sing that schmaltzy anthem one more time," she shouted, "I'll burn down the building!"

Carlisle left his seat and hurried to the pit. "It'll be all right, Jimmy. Annalisa's a pro. When the crowd's here, she'll perform."

Morelli was near tears. "Anarchy," he complained. "She only wants to hurt me. If Burt Bacharach had written 'The Baytown Rhapsody,' she'd sing it in the shower."

The saxophone player, Milt Simpson, was changing his reed. "If Burt Bacharach had written this opus," he murmured, "acid rain-drops would keep falling on his head."

"When are we going to rehearse your monologue?" The drummer, Earl Hack, hit rimshots while he pedaled a couple of thuds on the bass drum. It was vaudeville language, the unmistakable sound of a pretty girl walking by in a tight skirt.

Carlisle said, "I'll take it through with you later, Earl. I don't like performing to an empty house."

The thrill of working onstage as a comic Master of Ceremonies was Cootie's main motivation for embarking on this enterprise back in his old hometown. Last winter, at age sixty, he had sold his successful Toronto ad agency to an American multinational. With all that money in the bank, he was free to do whatever he wanted. Or what his wife Sylvia wanted. Her wish was to travel, preferably on a large ship with a good orchestra playing in the ballroom from dusk till dawn.

But Cootie (so called because his first name was his mother's maiden name, Coutts) could not forget vaudeville. It had been on its last legs in Montreal when he was getting started in advertising. Once a week, he used to attend the new show at the Gayety Theater. His heart would pound as the lights dimmed, the orchestra slashed through eight bars of "Fine and Dandy," and the MC strode to the mike at center stage where he would begin the brash litany. "Good evening, ladies and germs. It's a great financial pleasure to be here. I've been asked to announce that all the money I make tonight is going to help a very needy family. Of which I am the head." Ba-boom! Slam! "These are the jokes."

As the show rolled on, Carlisle would delight in watching the tapdancer, the vocalist, the accordeon player, the juggler, the animal act. And then the pulse-raising power of the star stripper in the number-one spot—Peaches, or Lili St. Cyr.

So when he drove to Baytown last winter for a visit and was told the old Bay Cinema was to be demolished, the idea struck him like a meteor, full of heat and light, tearing up his mental landscape. He would buy the building and preserve it, musty seats, ancient stage, orchestra pit, and all. Close the projection booth, remove the silver screen. Banish the Hollywood ghosts in favor of performers risking their souls by appearing live in front of a fickle crowd.

Now here he was on the afternoon of opening night with a stubborn singer and an hysterical orchestra leader. "Rehearse the dancers, Jimmy," Carlisle said. "Bring on Kenny and Karen Capricorn. This show is going to succeed with sex." The band struck up the introduction to Ravel's "Bolero" and voices backstage began screaming, "Ken—Karen—you're on!"

Carlisle turned away to be confronted by a giant with a fur head. This turned out to be a man carrying a woolly dog of indeterminate breed. Carlisle flinched. "You scared me," he said. "But I like it."

"That's always happening," the man said. He was a cheerful individual with apologetic eyes behind rimless glasses. "I'm Jeff Tarkin. This is Mutt. Sorry we're late. I was on a slow train from Centralia."

"Jeff and Mutt, of course. I was wondering what happened to you." Carlisle had hired only one out-of-town act—everyone else on the bill was local. He reached out to shake hands and ended up shaking a paw. In the dim theater, a tongue licked his cheek. He hoped it was the dog's. "I'm putting you fourth on the program, Jeff. Go backstage and find a place to hang your stuff."

As man and dog moved away, Carlisle responded to a hiss from the front of the house. A rotund man was standing in the entrance, breaking the fire law by smoking a cigar. "I want to talk to you, Carlisle. It's not too late for you to let me save your life."

The impresario recognized his rival for ownership of the Bay Cinema. It was the town's leading property speculator, Maxwell Shelley. "Kill that stogie, Max," Carlisle said. In buying the old building, he had come in fast and beaten Shelley to the punch.

"I've been watching the turmoil onstage," Shelley said. "You'll die a thousand deaths tonight. You'll be a laughing stock and lose your investment. But you can still accept my offer."

"So you can bulldoze this exquisite theater and erect a mini-mall? Just what Baytown needs—another place to buy ceramic mugs with smartass jokes on them. The show is going on, Max. And the worse the rehearsal, the better it will be on the night."

"Never happen."

"You hope. Because if I succeed, people will never again settle for your Cineplex on Station Street."

Last year, Shelley had erected a movie theater with six small screens in tiny rooms, each with 100 seats. There he exhibited movies featuring teenagers shouting at each other interspersed with scenes of cars crashing through store windows. Everything was backed by cheap rock music played so loud the audience emerged in shock, unable to remember the film they had just seen. It was designed to turn the population into eleven-year-olds and steal their money.

"Come back at eight o'clock, Max," Carlisle said. "I'll leave you a couple of Annie Oakleys at the box office."

Every seat in the old theater, now renamed The Baytown Follies, was filled fifteen minutes before showtime. Carlisle's tickets were \$1.00 below the cost of a movie at Shelley's Cineplex. And goodies at the refreshment counter were half price. Even without these inducements, the place would have been crowded. Baytowners were eager to see real people performing instead of fragmentary images recorded months and years ago and a thousand miles away.

The opening tapdance line, cheerleaders from Baytown High, was a hit even though the girl on the end threw a shoe which had to be retrieved and returned by a man in the fifth row. Cootie presided, working with a golfclub in his hands, knocking imaginary chip-shots as he filled in between the acts. "Chief Greb tells me the town is buying a new police car. The treadmill broke in the old one. And the squirrel got loose."

Annalisa Morelli Hogan came through as Carlisle had predicted. "And now," she said sweetly, "I would like to perform, for the first time anywhere, a new composition by my father, James Morelli. I believe it is his masterpiece—"The Baytown Rhapsody'."

The old sign painter in the pit, halfway through a flask of vodka, waved his arms like wings to bring the band to tempo. Then his daughter began to sing:

"The winter winds have swept the ice
That shimmers on the Bay,

As happy mates arrive with skates
To celebrate the day—”

By the end, the crowd was singing along through a repeat of the refrain. When the composer turned to conduct the audience, it was different only in size of numbers from “Land of Hope and Glory” on closing night of the proms at the Royal Albert Hall.

Backstage, Jeff Tarquin, the dog trainer, said to Carlisle, “Thank you for arranging a room at the Coronet Hotel. I’ll have no excuse for being late.” The hotel was directly across the street from the theater. “And thanks for clearing it with them to let me keep Mutt in the room.”

“You can repay me,” the impresario said, “by going out there and tearing up the place.”

The animal act was so simple it almost defied description. The curtain opened to reveal a small bar with two stools behind it. There were bottles and glasses to complete the decor. Jeff entered with Mutt and they sat on the stools. A stooge, as bartender, poured a drink in a glass for the man and one in a dish for his companion, then departed.

Jeff began a monologue, as if speaking to Mutt. It was a commentary on political news, current events, family life. The dog, of course, said nothing. But he took part by nodding at appropriate times and shaking his head at others. Nobody could see how Jeff elicited these responses from the animal, but they were increasingly funny. Once, when Jeff said something about the Prime Minister, the dog snarled, bringing down the house. His occasional lapping of would-be whiskey from his dish was a good running gag. When they finally ran off, Jeff and Mutt were established as one of the greatest animal acts since Bonzo and friend.

Opening night was a resounding success artistically. Financially, it was not so great. After the crowd had gone away, Carlisle spent time in the box office, checking receipts. With a full house—the best he could ever expect—balanced against expenses, the bottom line was a loss of several hundred dollars. Tickets were obviously priced too low. Maybe later he could raise the tariff.

“Mr. Carlisle?”

It was Milt Simpson, the tenor saxophone player from the pit band. “Come in, Milt. Take a seat,” Carlisle said.

“I wanted to ask you something.”

Simpson was a local hero, but one with a tarnished reputation. Years ago he had left town and landed a job in the reed section of

one of the leading name bands in the United States. Jazz aficionados used to search the pages of *Downbeat* to find references to the young Canadian making his name at recording sessions in New York or on the Coast. But Simpson had been arrested and jailed for possession of cocaine. Released, he was unable to kick the habit. No band wanted him. He freelanced for a while, then came back to Baytown, where he was now employed as counterman at the Paragon Cafe. The loss to the jazz scene was Cootie Carlisle's gain.

The musician said to his new employer, "Can you give me an advance on next week's pay?"

Carlisle blinked. "We've only done one night, Milt. I paid you the first week in advance."

"I know. I need money."

After a pause, Carlisle began, "Tell me if it's none of my business, but—"

"It's none of your business." Simpson squirmed at his own rudeness. "Am I playing okay?"

"Your music is magnificent. Listen, it *is* my business if my saxophone player can't function without drugs."

The musician got up and went to stand in the doorway. He wore a jacket with a large glen check in yellow and black. His tuxedo trousers had ribbon piping down the outseam and his loafers were of midnight-blue patent leather. He looked as if the bandbox he had stepped out of was located on 52nd Street in Manhattan—Swing Street. "Forget it," he said, "I'll get it somewhere else." And he was gone.

Carlisle locked up and drove home. The house he was renting was on Bridge Street, up the hill past the Anglican Church where he had sung in the choir while his voice was still soprano. Driving into the laneway and stopping underneath a lilac heavily in bloom, he recognized the grey Mercedes parked nearer the house. He went to the window on the driver's side and rattled his knuckles on the glass. Sylvia raised her head, blinked at him, smiled, and lowered the window. "Welcome to Baytown," he said. "If I'd known you were coming down, I'd have met you."

"I didn't intend to fall asleep. *You* look nice."

"Why didn't you stop by the theater?"

"I refuse to validate the place with my presence." She got out of the car and into his arms. He held her while he kissed the part in her hair. Lilac fragrance gave its approval. "The house looks even better than you described it," she said.

"If the Follies works out, I might buy it. Would you like that?"

"Spend my declining years locked up in your childhood dream? No, thank you. Try London."

Baytown in summer, with her husband's success on everybody's lips, was a temporary paradise even for Sylvia Carlisle. Now that the show was rehearsed and running, he was free to take her driving across the bridge into Prince Edward County, where baskets of harvester apples were on sale at the roadside. They bought cheddar cheese from a small dairy and found a secluded restaurant outside Picton where there was rhubarb pie, deep and rich and tangy.

But when he said, "Will you close the place in Toronto—move down here permanently?" Sylvia replied, "Wake up, darling. You're on a minor roll. But vaudeville *is* dead, just as we will be all too soon. Let nature have its way."

"Which means your way."

"Stop trying to recreate a vanished world. We're having fun this week, but it's a novelty. I want to bum around Europe, not Ontario. And I want you with me."

Both his hands were covering one of hers. He performed a long-standing ritual. One by one, he drew firmly on her fingers, causing a knuckle to crack almost every time. Then he said, "I hear what you're saying. But as long as the Baytown Follies continues to play this well, I can't walk away."

The Follies filled every seat, night after night. With customers returning a second or third time, some of the material began to wear thin and Carlisle encouraged his performers to vary their acts. They did their best, but most had daytime jobs to be taken care of and had little time for further rehearsal. The impresario himself inserted new jokes into his monologue. Some of them worked, but frequently he was forced to fall back on glib apologies: "I don't have to do this for a living, my brother is a television evangelist."

The sure-fire climax of every show was the erotic dance staged by Kenny and Karen Capricorn. With Milt Simpson's saxophone wailing through the hypnotic repetitions of Ravel's "Bolero," and Earl Hack nailing the staccato rhythm on the snare, the handsome couple let their bodies flow together and apart in a sequence of sensuous poses. Imperceptibly, the lighting phased from blue to violet to rose, fading at the end to leave the hall dark and silent for a few breathless seconds before the audience erupted in a roar of approval.

This adulation, better late than never, was poetic justice for Kenny Capricorn. In high school, with his sweet smile and gentle voice and long hair and ultimate involvement in a ballet class, he was dismissed as "a fairy." The acceptable aspirations of a Baytown boy were limited to underage drinking and performing well in fistfights at the Park Pavilion on Saturday night. Years later, when Karen Bosco arrived from Montreal to work as a nurse at the General and she teamed with Kenny and they were married, the gossip died. Still, he went about in tights and a headband, which was not the approved uniform at the poolroom. Now here was Capricorn with his gorgeous wife illuminating the stage. It was exciting and beautiful. It was as if those two English skaters had taken off the blades and transferred their act to the boards.

"You're looking smug, Carlisle," Max Shelley said after yet another closing of another show.

"Nice to be proven right."

"It won't last."

"Who says?"

"What you've got here is an aberration. Something will happen. You'll come down to earth."

Carlisle looked at his competitor with suspicion. "If anything does happen," he said, "you'd better have a good alibi."

Several days later Annalisa Morelli Hogan came to Carlisle in tears. "I want out," she said. "This nightmare has to end."

"Child, this is a dream come true."

"Not for me. I hear people laughing behind my back. They say it's like watching a whale on stage." The teary-eyed girl stared at the ancient interior. "I wish lightning would strike. Let the place burn."

There was panic on another occasion when Milt Simpson went missing. A substitute saxophone player had to be found. Later that night, after the performance, Carlisle spoke to Jimmy Morelli. The orchestra leader had mixed feelings. "When Milt is well, he plays ten times better than anybody. But I hate his drugs."

"Where does he get the stuff?" Carlisle asked.

Morelli, whose alcohol addiction had savaged his health and kept him poor, shook his head. "More to the point," he said, "where is he getting the money?"

A warning was delivered to Cootie Carlisle later that week. It came from an unlikely source. Ed Fish, owner of the paint-and-hardware store halfway up Front Street, was a patron of the Follies.

He knew, as did many people, about the problem Milt Simpson was having feeding his habit. Fish came to Carlisle and said, "Your saxophone player did a weird thing today."

"Tell me."

"He came in and bought two quarts of enamel. Candlelight Ivory. To paint his apartment, so he said."

"He lives in a small apartment."

"He also bought five gallons of paint thinner."

"Ah."

"He can't drink it, Cootie. It seems to me the only thing he can do with it is start a fire."

"You have my attention," Carlisle said. "Somebody may be paying our friend to commit arson. He's using somebody's money to buy drugs. Who would do such a thing, and why?"

Carlisle didn't pursue his suspicions with the paint merchant. He was cognizant of the laws against slander. But he took note that afternoon when he was walking on Front Street and spotted Maxwell Shelley leaving the Paragon Cafe. Pausing by the restaurant window and peering inside, he saw Milt Simpson behind the counter, tucking a fat envelope inside his pocket.

Promising himself to hire a night watchman, Carlisle concentrated on producing that night's show. Before the overture, he had a word with Jimmy Morelli.

"I see our wandering tenorman is back."

"He apologized for missing the show. Told me he was sick with the flu."

"Keep an eye on him, Jimmy. I wish he'd get into some sort of rehab program. Baytown is the wrong place for his problem."

Sylvia surprised him by showing up backstage just before the curtain. "If I can't beat you, Coutts, I may as well try joining you." She snapped her lighter and drew hard on a cigarette. "I'll be out front."

"You're smoking too much," Carlisle said automatically.

The entire cast was in excellent form. Annalisa sang two encores. Kenny and Karen were a sensation. The audience laughed so hard at Jeff and Mutt that the usually silent dog adlibbed a bark. Carlisle's monologue took off and seemed to fly of its own volition.

The cashier gave him Sylvia's message after everyone else had gone and Carlisle was checking the receipts. "Your wife said she

was impressed by the show and she's gone for a walk—she'll see you later at the house."

Sylvia was obviously being won over. Carlisle ran a total, put the books away, and went home. Exhausted from an eighteen-hour day, he lay down and was asleep in minutes.

His wife's touch as she came to bed sometime later reassured him. "Love you, darling," she whispered.

"Love you," he confirmed and went back to sleep.

The telephone rang. It was Police Chief Greb. "You better get down to the theater, Mr. Carlisle. It's on fire."

Sylvia was dead asleep. Carlisle dressed and ran down Bridge Street Hill, his eyes on a red glow in the sky behind the town hall. When he arrived at the barrier, the fire was under control.

"Lucky we got the warning in time," a fireman told him.

"What warning?" The old place had no smoke alarms, as both men knew.

"It was Mutt." Jeff Tarquin approached with the dog at his heel. "He likes to watch out the window of the hotel room. Suddenly he started barking and wouldn't stop. I had to get out of bed to shush him. That's when I saw the flames through the theater windows."

"Good old Mutt." Carlisle patted the dog's head.

"We got here barely in time to save it," another fireman said. "These old places burn like tinder. All it takes is heat from faulty wiring."

"Only this fire was set." Carlisle told Greb and the firemen about his suspicion of arson. He named Milt Simpson and talked about the paint thinner. He gave the musician's address and two officers in a cruiser were sent to pick up the saxophonist.

With the fire knocked down, the observers left the theater and walked across the market square to the police station. Coffee was served and the remains of a tuna sandwich set down as a reward for Mutt. Fifteen minutes later, Milt Simpson was delivered in handcuffs. It was hardly necessary to restrain him. Simpson was spaced out. He was accompanied by a young woman. "You guys are out of line," she murmured. "Milt's been with me since after he played his gig."

Carlisle began to feel uneasy. Simpson didn't look like a man who had been at work starting a major fire.

The police clearly saw it the same way. "We'll consider all possibilities," Greb said. "We could be back to faulty wiring. Or somebody's cigarette."

They finished their coffee and then walked back to see the firemen putting the finishing touches on their work. There was plenty of smoke damage and much of the backstage area was gutted. The building could be refurbished, but there would be no performances for some time.

"We can let Milt Simpson off the hook," Carlisle said. "If somebody had splashed five gallons of paint thinner around here, the building would be gone."

"We'll talk in the morning," Greb said. Then he and the other officers went away.

"Thanks for putting in the alarm," Carlisle told the dog trainer.

"We owe Mutt for that. Hey," he called to the dog, "get away from there!"

Mutt was nosing around the charred stage floor. As his owner turned away, the dog raised his head, holding something in his mouth. He shuffled forward and dropped a metal object at Carlisle's feet. The theater owner bent down and picked it up. It was an empty lighter-fluid tin. Carlisle inspected the container on both sides, then slipped it into his pocket and followed Tarquin out of the damaged theater.

The next afternoon, Maxwell Shelley came out of his private office to meet his visitor. Ushering him back inside, he said, "Sorry about your fire. Any idea who did it?"

"We'll never know, Max. Could have been a cigarette. But I've just come from a conversation with Milt Simpson. That boy is too strung out to be a liar. He told me you agreed to pay him for torching the theater. He'd already received the first installment. Buying all that paint thinner was his own crazy idea. He was going to do the job and then take the rest of the money and fly."

"The word of an addict against that of a law-abiding citizen?"

"Let's not debate it. I'm here to sell you the deed to the old Bay Cinema. You can knock it down and put up your mini-mall. And the entertainment-starved people will come flocking back to your matchbox cinemas."

Shelley's eyes were those of a greedy child. "Let's sign the papers."

"First you have to help Milt Simpson. You have to pay for his treatment at a drug center I know in Toronto. It's expensive. It'll take a year, but he's agreed to do it."

The joy faded from Shelley's eyes. "If I have to, I will."

"Do it, Maxwell. Once Milt is safe, we'll sign the papers . . ."

Carlisle had to make a few more telephone calls to Toronto before he could consider his Baytown folly a part of history. When it was all done, he went to see Annalisa Morelli Hogan. She was in her element at home, making lunch for her four children. Her husband, in his capacity as a Canadian National engineer, was somewhere between Baytown and Montreal at the controls of a diesel locomotive. She retained no resentment from having been questioned by the police and Carlisle promised she would not be bothered further. "You'll be glad to hear," he told her as he worked on a slab of her deep-dish apple pie, "that the Baytown Follies will never reopen." She beamed. Then she said, "But I'm sorry for you. It was your dream."

"You'll never have to sing 'The Baytown Rhapsody' again. I've arranged with a recording studio in Toronto to bring in a top singer and a band of twenty-five musicians. They'll make a spectacular arrangement and record it. Your father will be able to hear his masterpiece any time he wants to. Without bothering you." Carlisle handed over a scribbled piece of paper. "This tells you the recording date, the address of the studio, the producer's name and phone number. Take the information to Jimmy and make him happy."

Annalisa was moved. "How can I repay you?"

"There's another Toronto address on that list. A drug rehabilitation center. Drop in once in a while and give Milt Simpson the support he needs."

After making one more stop, Carlisle went back to the house on Bridge Street. He found Sylvia in the garden with a drink and a book.

"You can kiss this place goodbye," he said.

"How come?"

"I've been to see a travel agent. I've booked our flight to London, as well as a suite at a residential hotel in Knightsbridge."

Sylvia got up and kissed her husband several times. "Why did you change your mind?"

"The Baytown experiment is over. It worked. I scratched the itch." Carlisle took a swallow of his wife's drink. "But I may have to try it again."

"Where?"

"In London. They have pubs that put on entertainment. I'm thinking of buying one and running the show. Can you live with that?"

"I don't mind if you beat a drum and wear cymbals between your knees," she said, "as long as it happens in Chelsea."

Holding her in one of their familiar embraces, Carlisle asked, "Why did you do it?" Their eyes met. After thirty-two years of intimacy, she didn't have to say a word. "This was found in the ashes," he continued, showing her the lighter-fluid tin.

"Was it used to start the fire?"

"More than likely. And look." He indicated a price sticker on the tin. It was from a Toronto store where Sylvia did most of her shopping.

Her eyes filled up. "I watched the show. I saw how good it was. You were never going to walk away."

"What you did was desperate."

"I know. Are you going to turn that tin over to the police?"

He tossed it the length of the garden. It landed on a heap of compost.

"You're concealing evidence of a crime."

"And proof of your determination to keep us together. It reminds me," Carlisle concluded, "of the trouble I would have been in without you. Of the occasions when I would have got burned. The times I would have been shot down in flames."

Arm in arm, they walked slowly toward the house. Her presence beside him made his balance perfect.

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

TO VICTOR GO THE SPOILS

by JUDY GELLER

Poor Janet was married to Victor,
Who laughed when he beat her and kicked her.
One day with a gun
She stopped all his fun,
And her conscience never once pricked her.

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a **NEW Boley-McKee** story by

JOHN F. SUTER

Boley found the sheriff studying a computer printout. McKee looked up. "Hello, Boley. What have you put your foot into this time?"

"I'll tell you if I'm not interrupting you."

The sheriff put down the paper. "Looking at how many people got their taxes in on time for discount. Not up to last year. You're not interrupting. What's on your mind?"

Boley sat down and told him about Emma Guthrie's problem and his own investigation. "I've had no dealings with Cox," McKee said. "Just rumors. Some people seem a little uneasy about him . . .

THE OLD PINE TREE IS NO MORE

by **JOHN F. SUTER**

As Arlan Boley started driving from home, he set his tractor cap more firmly on top of his crinkly yellow hair. It was a fine mid-September morning and he had no heavy jobs to do for other people. He had thought to claim the day for his own.

Instead, at the prodding of his wife Geneva, he was driving in his jeep to see Emma Guthrie, widow of his old friend Ben. What he was getting into was a mystery to him.

"Do you know what she wants?" he asked Geneva over breakfast.

Sympathy was in her brown eyes, but she gave him no help. "Yes," she said, "but I promised to let her tell you."

"Something she needs done around the place now that Ben's gone?" She softened a little. "I'll say this, Arly. She's really got trouble."

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Boley pushed back his chair. "I'd best be on my way, then."
She kissed him. "I really appreciate this."

Guthrie's house was slightly more than two miles toward town along the winding road on the ridge where Boley lived. The house was a five-room one-story with white-painted aluminum siding. It was forty feet back from the road on fifty acres of mixed flat and hillside land. The place was well kept, with rhododendron flanking the front steps and several large maples providing shade on all sides but the rear.

As Boley left his jeep on the pull-in, he noticed that the yard was neatly mowed. Whatever Emma Guthrie's trouble was, she was still a creature of habit.

She had heard him arrive and had the door open before he had time to knock. She swung it back, a short, stocky woman with white hair combed to a cloud about her head—her way of fighting the reality of its thinning, Boley guessed. She was in her sixties. Boley didn't recall that her hands had trembled before.

"Come on into the livin' room, Arly," she said.

The living room, to the left of the narrow hall, smelled of furniture polish. Its rug was machine-made Oriental, reds predominating. The television was at the far end, facing the door. A sofa and an assortment of chairs, tables, and lamps primly lined the walls. It gave the impression of being intended for an audience. Then Boley remembered. Ben Guthrie's body had rested here for three days before it was brought to the cemetery. Emma had not yet rearranged the furniture.

She sat down on the sofa, its slipcover a bright floral pattern. "I'm glad you came, Arly," she said. Her voice, usually firm, held a tremor. "I need your help. Ben always trusted you. I don't think anybody in Wes' Virginia's been treated like I have."

Boley sat beside her and took her hand. "Tell me about it."

"It came from what Ben did to make sure I'd have 'nothin' to worry about if he went before me. That was like him. I always thought of him as a big old pine tree. Now that old pine tree's gone."

The back of Boley's neck tingled. The old pseudo-hillbilly song still haunted him. "The old pine tree is no more" line rang in his memory. "What did he do?" he asked Emma.

"Well, you know he was the best independent mechanic in the county, so he made good money. And he used a part of that to buy a life-insurance policy for thirty thousand dollars. He managed to

get it to the paid-up point, then, a little over a year ago, he decided to increase it to forty thousand. He'd made enough to get it to the paid-up point right away—had a separate paper that showed about this extra coverage."

"A rider," Boley said.

"Yes, that's what it was called. Anyway, Ben's been gone about six weeks. I couldn't face up to a thing for about a week, then I started to pick up the pieces. I went into town to the bank and got the will and the insurance policy and that rider thing from our deposit box."

"Was anything complicated?" Boley asked.

She frowned, adding another crease to her forehead. "Didn't seem like it. The funeral home took care of makin' sure about the death certificate and the official record from the state. The will's simple. I get all Ben had—but then I called Jim Cox about the insurance." Before she went on, she looked at Arly sharply with her grey eyes. "'Neva says Cox isn't your agent. Is that right?"

"Yes. I've never met the man."

"Good. Anyway, I called him and told him I wanted to cash in the policy. At first he wanted to convert it to somethin' that would pay off a little at a time, but I figured that it might outlast me. They's nobody else after I'm gone, so where would the money go? I just said no, have them send me a check for the whole amount."

She was evidently into the source of her problem. "He give you any arguments about that?" Boley asked.

"Oh, no. He was real polite. Said he had all the information on the policy in the file. Said he could get certification on Ben's death without trouble to me, he'd make out all the papers and mail 'em to me—all I'd have to do was sign 'em and return 'em and the policy in the envelope he'd provide."

"And that's what happened?"

She plucked at a seam in the slipcover. "That's it. I looked it over and it seemed all right. So I did just what he said and mailed it back. Then, two days later, I got bothered."

"Bothered? By what?"

She wiped the back of her hand across her mouth, which had begun to tremble. "I took a look at the copy of what I'd signed. It gave the amount of money comin' to me as thirty thousand dollars."

"Cox forgot about the rider for the other ten thousand?"

She nodded. "That's what I thought. I still had that paper. I hadn't sent it in with the rest—don't ask me why." She sighed heavily.

Then, in a stronger voice, she went on. "Right away, I called Cox and told him there'd been a mistake. What about this paper? I said. He didn't answer me right away. When he did, it sounded like you could have knocked him over with a feather. What paper? he wanted to know. His files didn't mention any such thing. Was I sure? I said I was—I had it right there in my hand."

"Then what did he say?"

"He said he was pretty tied up, but that he'd send his assistant, Martha Baker, by to get it the next morning. If it was genuine, he'd send it along after the policy, explainin' all about it."

"Let me guess," Boley said. "After he got it, he claimed it wasn't genuine."

She shook her head. "No. This young woman showed up and said she was Martha Baker. I showed her the paper. She took it and gave me a receipt."

"Then what?"

"I didn't hear another thing. A couple of days ago, a registered envelope was delivered by that Jack Lewis, from the post office. A check for thirty thousand dollars from the insurance company."

Boley leaned forward, his hands clasped between his knees. "And you called Cox right away?"

She sat straighter. "Better than that. I drove in there to see him. His office girl tried to tell me he was busy, but I didn't let her get away with it. He saw me, all right."

"How did he explain it?"

She turned her head away. "No use in repeatin' every word, Arly. He said the agency never left him any word about it. See, Ben had dealt with Raymond Tully, and Tully sold the business to Cox about two years back. And that paper he had this Martha Baker pick up—he never did see it. He said."

"I'd have been him, I'd have called her in and asked her about it right in front of you," Boley said.

"He couldn't. He denied ever tellin' me she'd come. Said nobody by that name worked for him. He had his office girl tell me her name, then he took me in the back where two other girls were doin' things with computers. Neither one was this Baker woman—didn't even look like her. And that's all there were." She began to cry. "He said he was sorry to disappoint me, but there must be some mistake."

She suddenly leaned forward and put her arms around Boley's neck, sobbing. "Oh, Arly, I feel like such a fool. Help me—please help me."

"Don't let it get you, Emma," Boley said, patting her shoulders. "We'll work this out. I might not be the right person, but we'll find you someone who is."

As her crying gradually ceased, he said, "Could you show me that receipt?"

"Which one?"

Boley was startled. "The one the Baker woman gave you. Is there more than one?"

She got to her feet and stood looking at the floor. "It just crossed my mind, and I should have shoved the lie back in that Cox's teeth when he said he'd never seen that paper. *He* was the one who sold Ben that other ten thousand. Ben paid cash for it and Cox wrote him a receipt. It was steeped to the paper, and that woman took it away, too."

She left the room hurriedly, and Boley could hear her opening drawers. She came back with a piece of paper and gave it to him. "Here's what she gave me."

The text was in longhand, written in a clear feminine hand in black ink. It was signed *Martha Baker*. Boley was dismayed. "I hate to add to your trouble, Emma," he said, "but this probably is worthless. Nothing here connects it to Cox. It uses the words, 'purports to be,' when it refers to the rider. No numbers to identify anything are here. It's on a receipt blank you can get anyplace they sell office supplies or stationery. Could be this isn't even her real name."

"You're not addin' to my trouble," she said. "It was bad enough already."

"Have you talked to your lawyer?"

"Steve Brown? Yes. His daddy, Dave Brown, was our lawyer before him. He was a good one, you surely know. Steve might turn out like him. Right now, I feel like he's got a lot to learn."

"What did he say?"

Her mouth set in a firm line. "He said it'd be hard to prove a thing without more evidence. Swallowed his adam's apple a couple of times. Made the same remark you did about that receipt. But—" she went on "—he did tackle that Cox. Got nowhere, of course. I'd not be surprised if Cox told him he was representin' an addled old woman." She smiled sadly. "Some of us get that way. Like Myrtie Smith."

Boley patted her hand. "Not you, Emma. And don't you let go of Steve Brown. We'll see if we can't get you some more help."

When Boley left, he was uncertain what that help might be. He

was also puzzled. The disappearance of the \$10,000 rider would certainly save the insurance company some money, but how would this benefit Cox? Besides, while he knew that insurers were often hard-nosed in settling, they would hardly condone what seemed to be thievery.

He decided to go into town and confront Cox. Even if he failed to wring the \$10,000 from the man, his pressure might cause a slip that could be exploited.

He was also trying to keep in mind the woman he hoped to see. Emma Guthrie had described her: "You'd look at her more than once. Could be five foot six or seven. Real white skin, high cheekbones. Dark brown eyes. Thin lips—top one hangs over a tiny bit. Brown mole 'bout the size of a round pinhead just above the upper lip. Rich chestnut hair. When I saw her, she had on a grey suit, white blouse, and a black silky lookin' bowtie."

Because of the influx of summer residents around the nearby lake, several new buildings had appeared in town. James Cox and Co., Insurance, occupied half the ground floor of one of these.

As Boley entered, a small open cubicle faced him on his left. It was occupied by a cheerful blonde girl busily typing on an electronic typewriter. She paused. "Can I help you?"

"I'd like to see Mr. Cox."

"And your name?"

"Arlan Boley."

The girl pushed an intercom switch. "Mr. Cox? A Mr. Boley to see you." She listened on an earphone. "Yes, sir," she said finally, and then to Boley: "Mr. Cox will be right out. You're lucky, he has a busy afternoon coming after lunch."

She had barely finished when a door next to her cubicle opened and a man appeared.

"Mr. Boley? Jim Cox. Do you want to come in?"

Boley, passing him as he stepped aside, was surprised. He had expected a large man. Cox, to the contrary, was just over five feet. In his early forties, he had a high forehead, his hair receding in greying waves.

"Are you interested in a policy, Mr. Boley?" Cox asked when they were seated. "If so, it might be better if one of my agents helped you. They might think the boss was trying to undercut them." He smiled briefly.

"I'd like to talk insurance," Boley said, "but I'm not in the market. I want to ask some questions about Ben Guthrie."

The polite interest remained on Cox's face. "How do you enter into Mr. Guthrie's affairs, Mr. Boley?"

"He was an old friend. His wife Emma asked me to help her."

Understanding showed in Cox's eyes. Sympathy replaced polite interest. "It's quite clear now. Emma Guthrie. That poor woman. So confused. I know all about what she claims, but I can't imagine where she gets these ideas. All I have to go on are Mr. Tully's files. To save time for both of us, I'll tell you that I never met Ben Guthrie, never sold him ten thousand dollars' extra insurance, and never issued a rider to that effect. And no Martha Baker works for me or is associated with me."

Boley returned the direct look that Cox gave him. "How about one of your agents?"

This question clearly was a new one and Cox seemed momentarily surprised. "It's not impossible that a deal could have been made, but Tully or I would have had to approve it. And it would be in the file."

"Any agents no longer with you?"

Boley could see that Cox was again unprepared. After a hesitation, he said, "No."

Before Boley could ask more questions, Cox gave him the same tour Emma had received. He was shown a general office, lined with files, where two young women were busy with computers.

"So you see," Cox said, standing before Boley at the door of his own office, "there's some terrible confusion on Mrs. Guthrie's part. A pity."

A thought struck Boley and he walked back to the general office and looked in. "Excuse me," he said, addressing both women, "have you worked for Mr. Cox for very long?"

The two women, one a heavy blonde, the other a heavy brunette, looked at each other. The blonde said, "I've been here ten months."

"Eight months," said the brunette.

"Ever meet a man named Ben Guthrie or hear of him?"

They shook their heads.

He asked the receptionist the same questions and was again disappointed—she had been there ten months, had heard of Guthrie only when the form was prepared for the redemption of the \$30,000 policy. Boley looked at Cox. "All for now," he said.

Cox dipped his chin. "Anything I can do. If you need any insurance, I'll be pleased to help you plan it."

Boley went home. Geneva was in the kitchen. "How did it go?"

"Not good. I think I'll call your cousin Tom in Charleston."

"Tom? Oh, yes—insurance. That's a good idea, Arly."

The next day, Boley went to the Sheriff's Office to talk to his old friend, Warren McKee. He found him studying a computer printout.

The sheriff looked up. "Hello, Boley. What have you put your foot into this time?"

"I'll tell you if I'm not interrupting you."

The sheriff, a spare man with a non-fading tan, put down the paper. "Looking at how many people got their taxes in on time for discount. Not up to last year. You're not interrupting. What's on your mind?"

Boley sat down and told him about Emma Guthrie's problem and his own investigation.

"I've had no doings with Cox," McKee said. "Just rumors. Some people seem a little uneasy about him. As for this Martha Baker woman, I don't know everybody, but I've never heard of her."

"That wouldn't have been unusual when Thelma was alive," he went on. "Nowadays I seem to pay more attention. Anyway, what do you think?"

"First, she's not in the phonebook," Boley said. "Next, I think he did it. He wants to paint Emma as an old woman who doesn't know where she's coming from. But when I gave him a chance to lay it on some agent who's quit and gone, he nibbled at it. He hated to pass it up, but he knew I'd be after whoever it was, and there's nobody to be after."

McKee smiled. "You do surprise me sometimes, Boley." He leaned back in his chair and stared at the opposite wall. "Same insurance company has an office over at Rich Springs. Why don't you go over and shoot the breeze with them?"

"It wouldn't hurt," Boley said. "And while we're on insurance, I called 'Neva's cousin Tom. He's in the business in Charleston. Not the same company as Cox."

"What did he say?"

"He was sympathetic, but said without evidence what can Emma do?"

"I'd have to say the same."

Boley reflected. "He admitted there were such things as crooked insurance men, though he wouldn't have a hand in any coverup."

McKee smiled. "And I thought you and me and a handful of others were the only honest people around."

"He has his own problems," Boley said. "Every now and then somebody comes in, buys car insurance, pays a few months' premium, then drops it. What they're doing is getting coverage at the time the car license is renewed and they have to list the policy. Then once renewal is made, they let it slide."

"I've heard of that," McKee said. "Makes an agent's record look bad." An odd look came over his face. "Maybe—"

"Maybe what?"

"Never mind. I could be wrong," McKee replied. He activated his intercom. "Nina? No hurry, but when you have time bring me last year's delinquent tax list, would you? Thanks."

Boley rose. "I know when I'm not wanted. Back taxes, huh?"

"No," McKee said. "I'm getting started on a hare-brained idea, and it's better to have just one of us fall flat on his butt instead of two. Why don't you check out that agency in Rich Springs? You got a Polaroid?"

"No."

McKee opened a desk drawer. "Here. Take mine. It might be useful."

That afternoon, Boley drove to the county's main community, Rich Springs. It was built chiefly in and along the sides of a long, narrow valley. He had no difficulty locating the Bradford Insurance Agency. It was on the long main street, in what seemed to have been originally a small shop. The inside layout was very similar to that of Cox's offices.

"I'd like to see Mr. Bradford," Boley said to the smiling redhead in the receptionist's cubicle.

"That would be Miss Bradford," the girl said. "Miss Mary Bradford. And your name?"

"Arlan Boley."

The receptionist relayed the message, listened to a reply, then looked up at Arly. "You may go into her office, Mr. Boley. The next door."

The first thing Boley saw when he stepped into the office was the small round mole on her upper lip.

The rest of Emma's description had been equally accurate. The young woman rising from her desk chair was Martha Baker.

He thought fast. Not knowing what McKee had in mind, he decided to give nothing away.

"Mr. Boley, how can I help you?" she asked.

"I live over near Elm Grove," Arly said. "I have a lot of heavy equipment I use in my work and I'm looking for the best rate I can get on insurance."

The young woman smiled. "This agency doesn't often have requests for such insurance, but I'm sure we can handle it. Let me take down the information."

Later, mentally thanking McKee, Arly succeeded in parking across the street. He waited in his jeep for a long time, then, in late afternoon, his patience paid off. She came out of the agency. Boley blessed the sunny day. He took two pictures, both of which turned out very well. The mole wasn't visible, but he was certain that Emma would recognize Martha Baker.

The next morning, he returned to McKee's office and laid the prints in front of the sheriff. "There she is. Emma swears to it."

McKee smiled. "Good hunch."

"How did you guess?"

McKee's smile became a grin. "Cox is married, but his wife doesn't fit Emma's description. So this Baker woman might have been a girl friend. Or, since the agency in Rich Springs isn't too old, it could be one that Cox started, with someone fronting for him. She didn't have to be the front, but maybe she worked there." As an afterthought, he said, "Maybe a girl friend, too."

"Then we can nail him?"

"Not yet. Come back in about ten days."

Boley was indignant. "*Ten days?* Why don't you sweat it out of her?" He tapped one of the prints. "Confront her with Emma?"

McKee waved a hand. "Let me do it my way, Arly. —Let's see, tax list, list from Motor Vehicles, spot checks—"

Boley shook his head and walked out with a wave of his hand.

Ten days later, at McKee's request, Boley picked up Emma and took her to the Sheriff's Office.

McKee stopped them from entering his personal office and led them to a larger room with a long wooden table and straight-back wooden chairs. "I'm sorry about this, Mrs. Guthrie," he said. "Here's where we question suspects. It's the only place where several people can get together. And there'll be several today."

"Have you arrested 'em? That Cox and that Baker?" she demanded.

McKee smiled gently. "Not yet, Mrs. Guthrie. They'll be here. We'll see what's what then."

Five minutes had barely passed when a deputy ushered Cox into the room.

"I got a call asking me to come over to help—" the insurance man began. Then he saw Boley and Emma. "Does this concern that pack of absurdities again? If it does, I'm leaving."

"Sit down, Mr. Cox," McKee said. "You can't guess what it concerns."

Cox sat, ignoring everyone, his lips pressed tightly together.

Another ten minutes passed, then the deputy brought in Mary Bradford.

"Come in, Ms. Bradford," McKee said. "I'm Sheriff McKee. Dixon, now that everyone's here, shut the door and stand there by it." He looked at Mary Bradford. "Ms. Bradford, I think you know everybody. Sit down and let's get started."

She glanced at the others, but hesitated to sit. "Not everybody. I don't know this lady." She nodded at Emma.

"You got a short memory, then," Emma snapped. "I remember you."

McKee rapped the table with his knuckles. "Part of this has to do with ten thousand dollars Mrs. Guthrie thinks she has coming to her. We've all heard about that, so I won't go over it again."

"I haven't heard about it," the Bradford woman interrupted.

"There are those who think otherwise," McKee said. "Just hang in and you'll get the gist of it. I'll start by admitting that without a certain piece of paper *and* a receipt given Ben Guthrie Mrs. Guthrie has a weak case."

He scanned their faces. "I'd like to throw out a suggestion as to why those two items had to disappear—if they ever existed. Let's say that Ben went to some insurance person with some cash and thought he'd bought ten thousand dollars' extra insurance. Only he didn't. That insurance person took a gamble. Ben might be like a lot of people around here—he might live up into his nineties. By that time, his widow would be too feeble to turn everything in properly, and those things would be overlooked. Or the insurance person would have left the state, or something else. That insurance person kept that money and the company was none the wiser." He turned to Mary Bradford. "Are you beginning to catch on, Ms. Baker?"

She wore a puzzled expression. "Ms. Baker? I don't get it."

"I think you do," McKee said. "However, let's move on to other

things. I got to thinking, and it came to me that people who knock back money in one way are apt to do it in another. Thanks to my friend, Mr. Boley, or his wife's cousin Tom, I saw what that might be."

He looked around the table again. "Everybody here knows that when you renew your car license in this state, you have to have an insurance slip proving that you're covered. What some of us don't realize is that that gives insurance agents a problem: some drivers are low on money or they just want to cut corners. These guys buy a policy, but they only pay enough premium to get past renewal time. After that, they drop the policy."

"But the rest of the time they're just gambling!" Emma exclaimed.

"Yes, ma'am," McKee said. "Now let me expand that. Suppose some insurance person decides to cut a piece of that pie. Suppose the driver gets a policy with a number that never shows up in the company's computer files. Suppose the slip he gets also has this phony number on it. Suppose the insurance person's pocketed the premium."

"Suppose," said Boley drily, "something happens to the driver in that period."

"I'd enjoy thinking about that," McKee said, "but I have to get on. Let me tell you what I did. I got last year's tax files and looked for delinquents. Took myself a cross-section of this area and over around Rich Springs. Then I sent this list to Charleston, to Motor Vehicles, and asked for a quick answer on which ones were driving cars and when the license was renewed. Can you believe it, I did get a quick answer.

"What next? I had my deputies do spot checks in both those parts of the county to see how many of these people had insurance slips in the car, as required—how many of these slips had run out. I had them copy the policy numbers, the number that has to be on the slip. Then I listed all of the numbers that were supposed to belong to a certain insurance company together with the policy holder's name. I sent that list by registered mail to the company, asking if their records agreed."

He stopped and let tension build. After a long interval, in which nobody spoke, he resumed. "Guess what? I got a telephone call from that company late yesterday. I sent them twelve names. The person who called said that none of them shows in their records, either in Connecticut or in Pittsburgh, the district office."

McKee's smile warmed Boley's heart, but he doubted that two persons in the room shared his feeling. Neither looked at the other.

"In case somebody here doesn't get it," McKee said, "there's some skimming going on in car insurance around here." He looked at Cox and Bradford in turn, but failed to catch either's eye.

He waited for comment. None came.

"Seems you've got two problems," Boley said finally. "Ben Guthrie and this car-insurance thing."

"Just so," said McKee. "And here's what I suggest. Sometimes individual insurance people can be real generous to local needs and help people less fortunate. I'd like to see some examples of that right here in this county real soon. A Guthrie Fund, maybe. I have in mind an explanation I can give that insurance company. Suppose a bunch of fringe policy holders stole some insurance papers—blanks or whatever—and invented numbers close to some real ones. We haven't caught up with these miscreants yet, but we expect to. If the local charity meets its goal, that's the story I tell. Of course, if I'm disappointed an investigator from Pittsburgh might show up."

He slapped his hand on the table. "Well, that wraps it up. You're all free to go. Dixon, open the door. Thank you all for coming."

Silence marked the departure of the insurance persons. When they had gone, Emma walked to McKee and kissed him. "Sheriff," she said, "you're as good a man as Ben and Boley. Thank you."

"Thanks might be a bit early," he answered. "You don't have the money yet. Anyway, this has given me something to think about."

"How so?" Boley asked.

"Why, there must be something in all this that'll show me how to collect all the taxes that people don't want to pay."



Lois had never heard of such a thing. "Oh, yeah, it happens too much," the young water-department employee told her. "Last summer a guy left the end of a hose in a tub of gasoline he was using to clean car parts, went inside to use the john, and lit a cigarette as he flushed. The rear wall of the house blew out. Didn't do him any good, either . . ."

OUT OF HER MISERY

by CAROL CAIL

Twenty-four and a half years she'd lived with him. Now she was going to kill him.

She'd tried to avoid it—hinting, and then announcing straight out that she wasn't happy. She'd never been a nagger. She'd been raised to defer to masculine viewpoints. Nagging wasn't the participation sport for her that it was for her friends.

As Lois Rennert saw it, Duane's primary personality defect was that he didn't think he had any. The man she'd married for his self-assurance had usurped herself as well. Anything she wanted to do, she had to convince him he'd thought of it first or an executive veto resulted. Every statement she made he held under a mental magnifier until the inevitable error became clear. Each weak flailing toward independence she attempted he saved her from by interceding with his own version of what was best for her.

There was the time she decided to clerk part-time at a local gift shop, having been "just a housewife" all her adult life. She surmounted the heart-thumping initial interview, experienced the thrill of being hired, and endured the shame of Duane phoning the shop next morning to advise them that his wife did not need a job and would not be coming in.

It was shortly after that that she started researching ways to put him out of her misery.

Divorce wasn't the answer. Duane would worry the request meaningless. His refusal would go something like this: "You don't want a divorce, you want attention. Think how bothersome a divorce

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is—the lawyers and the division of the spoils. You aren't experienced enough to handle the realtors and bankers and tax people and everyone else I deal with for you now. It's a shark world, and you're a minnow."

She was torn between poison and pushing him under a bus.

She borrowed books from the library without using the checkout desk, not wanting to leave a public record of her sudden interest in toxins, forensics, and the penal code. But nothing she read struck her fancy.

She spent thoughtful hours touring the house, looking for accidents about to happen. A loose stair-runner? An electric cord worn bare? A TV screen about to implode, a drapery pull about to tangle into a noose, a steak knife about to careen out of control?

And then she found the goldfish in the bathtub.

It was a hot Friday evening. She had turned on both taps and was waiting to test the temperature with her hand. Something metallic cascaded out with the water, and while she gaped at the sleek orange fish undulating around the white porcelain a second one tumbled out of the spigot.

"Duane," she did not scream but said sharper than usual.

It occurred to her he was outside, and she strode to the window that had always been difficult to open and threw it up so hard the glass shimmered.

"Duane?"

He answered from immediately below. By pressing her forehead to the screen, she could see he was washing the station wagon.

"Would you please come up here a moment?"

He said something unintelligible except for the tone. A bucket rang against cement, then the kitchen door slammed and his sneakered feet squeaked up the wooden stairs.

"Look," she said.

His expression didn't change as he studied the two goldfish pacing in the quieter end of the filling tub. He jerked both handles to stop the flow of water. "What are you doing?" His voice had an accusatory inflection.

"They came out of the faucet! I just turned it on and they poured out with the water!"

Duane pinched his lower lip to help him think. Then he stalked out of the room. "What are you going to do?" she called after him.

"Phone the city. Complain to the damn water department."

She started putting on the clothes she'd started taking off.

From the foot of the stairs, he instructed, "Don't pull the plug! Keep the evidence!"

An operator at the water-department extension interrupted Duane's critical discourse to promise him someone would be out right away. Duane scarcely had time to add this lie to his grievance list before the doorbell announced the predicted employee, a young man in a T-shirt and jeans, with the guileless face of a newsboy collecting for the paper.

Lois hid out in the kitchen, emptying the dishwasher, squeamishly vigilant for poached goldfish. In minutes, the two men tramped downstairs and through the kitchen into the back yard, the baby-faced representative expounding. "It's called cross-connection. The way the plumbing was constructed, it lets water run backward—from a garden hose, say—and contaminate your public water system."

Lois trailed behind them and saw the young man lift Duane's car-washing hose out of the ornamental pond by the driveway.

"Yep. You laid down your hose in the fish pool, and when your wife turned on the faucet upstairs it sucked water and fish right into your main line. If you'd had the hose resting in the bucket of suds, she'd have had an automatic bubble bath." He swiveled to grin at Lois, and she shook her head, embarrassed and fascinated.

He dropped the hose and it writhed once. "So you've got a bad connection somewhere that lets backflow occur," he told them. "What you need to do is drain your water heater and all your faucets to clear out the bad water. You may not have any more fish in there, but you'll have whatever else was in that pond—germs, chemicals, fish waste. Then you need to get hold of a plumber to install the proper valves to prevent further contamination."

He smiled at Lois again and she blurted, "I never heard of such a thing."

"Oh, yeah, it happens too much. Last summer a guy left the end of a hose in a tub of gasoline he was using to clean car parts, went inside to use the john, and lit a cigarette as he flushed. The rear wall of the house blew out. Didn't do *him* any good, either."

Lois clucked her tongue.

"The most common contaminations, though, happen at factories or businesses with chemicals, acids, heavy metals, what-have-you. Then you've got pesticides and herbicides in farm and yard work. The city's got an inspection program that should eventually do away

with all the hazards." He pried a wirebound notebook out of a jeans pocket and scribbled in it. "We'll be back to check you out in, oh, a week. A week should give you enough time to have a double-valve assembly installed."

He pumped Duane's hand and winked at Lois. It wasn't often she'd seen her husband in the role of lecturee—she found herself winking back.

The young man left, and Duane, his mouth pursed like he'd encountered sand in his salad, went inside to drain the waterpipes. Lois upended the suds from the bucket and scooped up enough pond water to serve as taxi for the trespassing goldfish. She restored them to the bosom of their family and then followed her thoughts to the tool shed.

Nicotine. Tetrachloride. Chlordane.

Duane's voice leaked from the kitchen window. He was trying to pressure a plumber to come out first thing Monday morning and ungratefully settling for first thing Tuesday. That gave her three days to invent a recipe with a secret ingredient. Could she lead authorities to the obvious conclusion that the cross-connection problem was responsible? She'd been in the senior-class play twenty-six years ago and garnered compliments, hadn't she?

"Lois!" he bellowed from the back door, making the Diazinon canister squirt out of her hands and thump the opposite wall. She forced a sedate smile and walked as slowly as she dared to his summons.

She boiled water for supper and again at Saturday breakfast, to demonstrate she was being careful. At lunchtime, still procrastinating about which poison to use and how, she carried an unused catsup bottle to Duane, who was on the porch swing being incensed by the morning paper.

"Would you open this dang thing, please?"

Unscrewing the cap, he handed it over with an indulgent, "There you are, Lo. What would you do without me?"

The reply that flitted through her mind was not the one he'd expect. And then she was struck by the import of the question. There were, after all, many little things, and some not so little, that she'd always depended on him to do for her. "I think there's a gadget you can buy," she mused, not noticing he hadn't expected this answer, either.

I'll do something nasty to supper, she promised herself as she continued preparing a perfectly wholesome lunch. As her fingers

worked on automatic pilot, her brain did aerobatics with the notion she might actually miss Duane.

He'd always handled everything financial—insurance, investments, taxes. She'd never even learned to reconcile the monthly checking-account statement. Anything requiring a tool, from putting up a picture to putting down floor tile, Duane had done. Before she cast herself loose from him, she'd better know how to swim.

And so when lunch was over and Duane dragged out the lawnmower, Lois hung casually over his back to watch what he did to start it up. "What do you want?" he demanded.

"I just thought if I knew how to operate the mower, I could help you sometimes."

"I'd rather do it myself than worry about you cutting off the roses, or your toes."

"That's okay. I'll just keep you company then." She took a stance, crossing her arms.

The mentor in Duane outweighed his desire to bar her from the lawnmowing elite. "This is the throttle. The gasoline goes in here. This puts it in gear." But he didn't let her take it for a spin.

She perched on the porch railing sidesaddle as he followed the slashing blade around the grass. Conscious of her attention, he made skilled parries at the shrubbery.

What else should she know in preparation for widowhood? She could hire someone to do the taxes or whatever else she hadn't mastered, but (she scolded herself in Duane's voice) there's no use paying good money for things she could do if she knew how. She didn't think it was rationalizing when she decided to let Duane live through another meal to give her more time to consider the extent of her ignorance.

The first thing Lois noticed when she began preparing Sunday breakfast was that the wooden knob on the skillet lid was hanging by a thread. Normally she'd have taken it to Duane. Today she carried it to the garage, found a screwdriver the right size, and, feeling the pride of a craftsman honing his craft, she ground the screw into the soft metal.

"What are you doing?" Duane was beside her.

"I fixed the handle." She gave the screw an extra, reflexive twist.

"Be sure you put that screwdriver back exactly where you found it." He took the lid away from her to examine the other side. "It needs a nut to keep it from working loose again."

Instead of retreating to the kitchen, Lois watched as he stirred through a plastic box of assorted fasteners, wound a square-shaped silver piece onto the screw tip, and, holding that with an odd, handled thing, tightened the screw again. She noticed where he put everything afterward and smiled innocently at his suspicious glower.

Lunchtime, and she still didn't make her move. She hoped she was being provident and not just wishwashy.

After lunch, Duane walked from bedroom to laundry, five pair of shoes radiating from the fingers of both hands, for the once-a-week polishing ritual. Two pair were hers. She knew how to polish shoes.

She hunched over the kitchen table with a sheet of lined notebook paper to make a list of things Duane had been doing for her. In no time, she'd filled up two columns on one side, writing "sex" for the last entry when she couldn't think of anything else. Next, she put checkmarks beside each activity of high priority. Finally, she put x's by all the items that only Duane could teach her, like how to open the safe and where to find the storm windows—all subjects that would be difficult to slip casually into a conversation.

Bemused, she bit her middle fingernail to the quick, a habit she had not indulged since the first month of their marriage, when Duane had painted her fingers with ipecac. No poison for supper. She had to think about the list, which she secreted in the freezer.

Monday dawned, and, recognizing that her opportunities were running low, Lois prepared a blameless breakfast and a fault-free lunch bag. Imagining the sinister music to accompany her, she peered through a break in the curtains at Duane's station wagon leaving the garage, the premises, the street. She retrieved her chilly list and considered where to begin her edification.

The steady drip of the kitchen faucet picked little holes in her concentration. She purposefully approached the sink, found a screw-head on the back side of the spout thing that activated the water, and went in search of the screwdriver—easily found, thanks to Duane. She was sure a hardware-store employee could "talk her down" on how to change a washer.

By the time Duane got home for the supper Lois had been too busy to poison, she had, in addition to her usual housekeeping chores, tightened the faucet, washed and gassed her own car, electrically trimmed the hedges, bundled the leavings for the trash collectors, and silenced every hinge on the entire property. The day's mail had included a bank statement, which she discovered gave

instructions for balancing the checkbook right on the back, presumably every month. She even found a ten-cent error in Duane's subtraction.

She knew better than to call any of her accomplishments, especially the dime correction, to Duane's attention. But he did notice the hedge—because, he said, she must have done it with her eyes shut—and after supper, with the air of a man who wanted to be watching televised baseball, he shouldered the clippers and went to "cut it short, but what else can I do?"

She wished she'd put the chlordane in his soup.

In bed that night, he tossed and squirmed and eventually expelled, "What's got into you?"

She tossed and squirmed and eventually convinced him she was only trying to help. His "Don't do me any favors" was a cliché but obviously heartfelt.

At breakfast, her last chance to ply Duane with poison and blame it on the plumbing, Lois set the table serenely, having decided there would be a better method in the future—something less risky for herself—after she'd become truly independent and capable. Thumbs up today from Lois-the-Good.

Usually she hated tradesmen, repairmen, *men*, who inevitably bullied or belittled her—or, rather, made her think they did. Today, secure in the knowledge that she could change a washer, Lois showed the plumber around the house, confidently lounging in doorways to pick up pointers which he seemed equally comfortable sharing. After he'd left, she blushed to realize she'd actually flirted for maybe a minute.

All week she drove Duane crazy. Every time she asked a question (such as "How often do you clean the furnace filter?"), his blood pressure seemed to leapfrog. ("Never in the summer, damn it—what is this?")

"Why?" he kept demanding. "Why do you want to know?" And she would assure him again that she only wanted to help.

One week to the day since she'd found goldfish infesting her bath, Lois decided to let Duane live. Her newfound abilities had reinforced her self-confidence, and vice versa. Duane's criticisms had lost their sting—they merely tickled her sense of superiority. And he, aware of the change without being able to account for it, all but stamped his feet and shook his fists.

To celebrate her conclusion not to commit murder, Lois purchased, assembled, and installed a bookcase unit in the living room to accommodate the how-to books she planned to collect. After supper, she paraded Duane past it, inviting him to test the tightness of the screws nestled in their nuts.

Once he'd have insisted on such an examination without her prompting. Now he swayed his head, his expression as befuddled as if he'd suffered some violence. She followed his shuffling steps back to the kitchen, where she discovered him feeding dishes into the maw of the dishwasher. "What are you doing?" she asked.

"Loading the dishwasher," he answered reasonably.

"But why? You never load the dishwasher."

"I just want to prove to myself I can," he snapped with some of his old spirit.

"Oh," she whispered. She bit her tongue when he put a paring knife in the basket business-end up and forced herself to look away completely as he balanced a plastic cup over the heating element.

"Uh, Lois, while we're on the subject of learning things—I wish you'd show me how to operate the microwave."

She stared over her stiffened shoulder at him. Like a soap-opera hero making some momentous, probably distasteful decision, he sucked a deep breath and straightened his back before saying, "And the sewing machine."

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

ROYAL FLUSH

by D. PIRO

There once was a blonde so delectable
That she prompted a king most selectable
To say to his queen
As her face turned quite green,
"I sure hope that stuff's undetectable."

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a **NEW Rosetta Street story by**

JEFFRY SCOTT

"Harry's a friend, sir," said Nick, "but I hardly see him around the nick. I've never seen him drunk on duty or even the worse for liquor, for what that's worth. It's no secret that Harry likes a drop, but he's no alcoholic, either." Dropping the officialese, Nick pleaded, "Come on, Alf, Glebe's a tearaway once he finishes work, loves the Vino Collapso. He's also a bloody fine copper who lives for the job."

Anyone looking to write a satisfying detective story these days would do well to read this one. Solid construction, lifelike characters who count for something in the story, fair play, wit, loose ends neatly tied up at the end, and—not to be overlooked—a healthy dose of emotion . . .

PUTTING IT RIGHT

by JEFFRY SCOTT

She was all right for a shrink—and an American shrink at that, Nick Flinders considered.

Linda Kalp had it all: darkly exotic good looks not dependent on cosmetics, good brain to match, class without snobbery, and style without effort. She was a feminist, of course, but you couldn't expect miracles, and true perfection demands a flaw, if only to improve the rest by contrast.

"Spoken like a true male fascist," Linda laughed when he shared the thought. "Don't ever change, Nicky."

She was renting a doll's house on what older Rosetta Streeters know as The Isle, a few closely packed acres in a bend of the canal, down in the corner formed by Cap-a-Pie Lane and Great Northern Prospect. A crazed developer had tarted up several rows of Victorian

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artisans' cottages. The boldest Yuppies considering the high-crime area too much of a challenge, Linda Kalp had a bargain of sorts. "I'm not great on possessions," was her laconic riposte when everyone accused her of being as crazy as the developers.

She and Sergeant Flinders had dined al fresco on a patio the size of a pool table. But then the portable barbecue was no bigger than a hatbox. "Mesquite," Linda had explained when thinly pungent haze made him sneeze. The chicken emerged tangily crisp outside and succulent within.

Licking his fingers, sated, he said, "You're the first to call me Nicky and live to tell the tale, my girl."

Letting the compliment ride, Linda lay back on the canvas lounge and sighed. "No matter what they say, paper plates and plastic forks are the peak of civilization."

"Power without responsibility," Nick suggested. "Eat now, don't wash up later. Way to go." He was even learning a bit of American. For a knockabout London copper with a face like a slab of rock, rainwater frozen in a couple of its chinks for eyes, he was holding his own. He split the last of the wine between their glasses. A city summer night had sidled in while they ate. The sawtoothed roofline of a factory the far side of the canal showed as flat blackness against rose and azure sky. This is as good as it gets, he thought. Another of her expressions.

Idly, Linda rolled the glass against her cheek and said, "You drink with Harry Glebe, huh?"

"He drinks, I watch. Harry could booze for England and bring us home a gold from the Olympics. Freak metabolism. I figure the stuff must evaporate before it gets into his blood or something. Plus, he loves the taste."

Belatedly, Nick recalled that Linda was on contract with the Metropolitan Police—a stress specialist. She'd been recruited as a consultant and was studying the scale and effects of pressure on very different Divisions—one a lace-curtains and two-cars-in-the-drive suburb over by Heathrow, the other a really down-at-heel manor.

He was alerted not by her expression, for hers was hard to read as twilight fled, but her motionless silence, the glass pinned against her cheek. Then she said drily, "Think before you speak next time. And you're going to be asked."

"Shop talk," Flinders said flatly. Trying to ease the jagged quality surfacing in his voice, he joked, "And here was me thinking I was in with a chance—picnic for two and maybe an overnighter."

"Ah, Nicky—lovers are everywhere, but how often can you find a friend?"

Composure regained, he wagged his head in mock amazement. "Marvelous. Women all over the world must get it along with their designer jeans—standard response number one: 'I don't see you that way, you're like a brother.' I wonder how it comes out in Swahili?" Flinders stopped kidding. "Harry Glebe's my friend, too, love."

Linda rose lithely and his eyes hurt for an instant as she switched on the patio's floodlight.

"Don't push it. Take it as a given that Sergeant Glebe is heading for big trouble."

Before he could argue, she went on, "He can go to hell and most like will, but you're one of the good guys, behind all that macho and True Brit stuff. I'm not a virgin, Nicky, in any sense of the word. I know law enforcement, I've been around PDs for years, and London is no different than New York. One rogue cop hits the self-destruct button and nice people can get trashed by the fallout."

"Harry's straight as a die—whatever that is," Nick countered. "Straight as *I* am, so put a sock in it. Rogue cop! You've never taken to Glebey—that group chinwag last week, you had the needle to him then."

"He beats his wife," she explained matter-of-factly. "That does nothing for my objectivity."

Flinders felt winded. "Never. Him hit Jean? I can't believe it. You don't know those two—she's a smashing girl and Harry worships her."

Linda, trim in cutoffs and tank top, began bouncing the edge of her fist off her thigh. "Sure. I didn't believe it, either. But what I didn't believe even more was that Jean Glebe walked into a door and that's how she got the mouse—and the darling little cut under her eye, from his pinky ring. It comes with gender, Nicky: your incredulity is not the same as mine."

She opened her hands to shrug and smile. "End of story. We both have to work in the morning and it's kind of late, huh? I'll walk you to the door."

Less than a week afterward, Detective-Sergeant Harold Edward Glebe was suspended and the scandal and disgrace permeated Rosetta Street police station with a uniquely elusive, stomach-turning reek.

Not quite unique, really—something like that from a rotting corpse . . .

Nick Flinders was among the first to learn of it, though at the time he didn't realize what was emerging.

Harry Glebe hadn't been with the Rosetta Street CID for long. He was a transfer from HQ and Superintendent Hurry-up Harrington's elite squad—the way they and their boss saw it, anyway—of Target Criminal hunters. Sergeant Glebe was a big fellow and sharp with it, not always a guaranteed combination, and for all his wild-man image promotion stood on the horizon. The word had been that he was being toured around for a year or so before ascending.

His contact with Sergeant Flinders, thus far, had been sporadic and wholly social, the occasional late night at The Other pub. Nick gathered that his friend was involved in a Need To Know operation, something long and tedious but important. The only fact Harry had mentioned was that he was teamed up with Detective-Constable Levine. "Great privilege for you, I'm sure," Flinders scoffed, and Glebe had grinned and said, "Bitchy, bitchy, bitchy. Levine's not such a bad lad—he can't help being stinking rich." Which was Harry Glebe all over. He judged by results.

Flinders encountered Peter Levine a few mornings after his chat at The Other with Harry. They met in the parking lot, Flinders bleary from bed, turning up for early turn, young Levine plodding out like a man walking underwater. Nick couldn't define the look, but stunned and sickened and bereft came into it.

Heartlessly, he wondered whether Levine had crashed that pretty, sexy, infuriating car, or had it stolen. That would start the day right. For while Flinders strove not to resent DC Levine for his youth, prospects, handsome face, and the fact of having entered life a jump ahead—often succeeding for days at a time—the car kept blowing his saintliness away. The Japanese sports two-seater, a mid-engined, flying wedge of glass and metal costing more than Sergeant Flinders made in a year, positively demanded spite and grudgingness.

Peter Levine, strictly speaking, didn't have money, but there was an uncle in supermarkets and his mother wasn't hurting. Further, he was always obnoxiously well dressed and groomed, and was an aftershave freak to boot. Nick had always been irked by scent for men, call it what you liked.

So that morning, overtly innocent, not seeing the car, he inquired, "How's your luck, then, Pete?" with a lilt of relish.

To his dismay, Levine took the remark literally, biting his underlip and half sobbing, "It's been awful, Sarge—awful," before trudging on.

Nothing to do with the notorious car, though, for there it was, bloomed with overnight dew but otherwise pristine.

Fumbling at the door, Levine looked back at Nick. "I covered for him as long as I dared. Ask Harry—he'll tell you."

Inspector Pass was the very model of a model police officer. Teetotal non-smoker who never gambled. Faithful husband, devoted father. Non-ordained preacher at a weird yet respectable chapel at Pinner, Middlesex. Absolutely convinced that those who impose rules must observe the most piffing of them. He didn't walk the line, he was the line.

Obviously this meant that Inspector Pass was a rotten thief-taker and deeply unpopular with his peers. So he'd been made a rubber-heel boy, a copper preying on other coppers. He was quite good at that.

Nick rather liked Alf Pass. Yes, he was a pain and a bit of a joke, but Nick had grown up under his chilly, stuffy wing—Pass had been Station Sergeant at his very first nick. Just as DC Levine exuded Anteus, Alf Pass stalked around in a fog of narrow-minded decency and sternly bridled kindness perceptible as kitchen soap.

The day after meeting Levine in the parking lot, Flinders was sent to HQ for a talk with Inspector Pass. "You know what this is about, Sergeant." Pass, gawky and rawboned, with a nose to rival the Duke of Wellington, might never have clapped eyes on the other man before and sounded emotional as the speaking clock.

"I know who it's about. Harry Glebe. I keep hearing rumors, and half or more of them have to be science fiction."

Inspector Pass debated with himself. "Rumors, you say. If the Press ever gets onto the fantasy, never mind the substance, it will be a bad blow for us, Sergeant. You know of Eric Ledbetter, right?"

Warning, thought Flinders. It was what the tutor kept yelping during a recent sailing course. You said it just before the boom scythed across, unstoppable from the wind and capable of hurling the unwary into the sea. Or smashing their heads in. Ricky Ledbetter was a career criminal, a villain with territorial ambitions and one foot in Rosetta Street's manor. Violence wasn't his thing, but he'd destroyed a few policemen in his day. Given the least encouragement, he did his level best to buy them.

"You do know of him," Alf Pass concluded. "Currently, Ledbetter is back at the long-fraud game—front men open small shops, estab-

lish credit, then when the manufacturers are used to them they order massive deliveries and vanish along with the goods."

Nick nodded impatiently.

"A lot of the stuff, close to a million pounds in electrical goods, was taken to a warehouse on the industrial estate behind Great Northern Prospect. It was Ledbetter's depot. Sergeant Glebe and a DC were tasked with keeping observation: none of these crooks trust each other an inch and at some point Ledbetter was bound to make a personal visit. Stocktaking, if you will—then and only then could he be nailed to the long frauds."

Pass sat a trifle straighter. "Ledbetter did make such a visit, on Monday night. He was in the warehouse for the better part of three hours, until about one o'clock the following morning. He walked in, lingered, and walked out again, scot-free—because Sergeant Glebe was asleep. Unconscious through drink."

Opening his mouth to protest that it was impossible, Nick checked himself. It *was* impossible. Harry Glebe had gargantuan thirst and hollow legs. He didn't get drunk and—illogical qualification—if he did get drunk, he never passed out. Flinders stifled the rebuttal because of the door it opened. Harry Glebe, drunk as a lord, could get kicked out of the force. Harry Glebe, taking a bribe to look the other way, might well end up in prison. There's one law for the rich, another for the poor; likewise, a policeman's sentence is not the same as any other criminal's.

"Yes?" Pass prompted drearily. The old devil was way ahead of him.

"Harry's a friend, sir," said Nick, "but I hardly see him around the nick. I've never seen him drunk on duty or even the worse for liquor, for what that's worth. It's no secret that Harry likes a drop, but he's no alcoholic, either." Dropping the officialese, Nick pleaded, "Come on, Alf, Glebe's a tearaway once he finishes work, loves the Vino Collapso. He's also a bloody fine copper who lives for the job. And I'd say this—it takes two to tango. If Harry wasn't on his tod that night, Peter Levine is his backup. Where was he when Ricky Ledbetter went in?"

Inspector Pass looked down that endless nose. "Two wrongs make a right? Doesn't work, Sergeant. Glebe was on the top floor of a building directly opposite the side entrance to the warehouse, the most likely ingress for Ledbetter. DC Levine was in a lockup shop across the way from the main doors. They had personal radios but

were observing radio silence—the likes of Ledbetter use scanners, just as they wear gloves for a break-in.

"The two officers had visual contact, though each of them could see only one of the entrances. Obviously they couldn't hang out of the windows waving to each other all night, but there was an established routine of signals back and forth. DC Levine sighted Sergeant Glebe several times and assumed that he was alert. Ledbetter arrived and departed out of Levine's sight. But at least he was awake throughout."

The duel continued for a while, Flinders stonewalling, Pass intoning his litany, both aware of going through the motions. Finally Pass gave in. "Thank you, Sergeant—though for what is beyond me. You shouldn't need telling that Sergeant Glebe is under suspension and must not be approached nor consorted with in any way pending the outcome of this business." He cleared his throat. "Um, now that's over, Nicholas, take heed, eh? Drink really is a mocker. It's worth consideration, taking the pledge."

"I'll give it thought, Alf," Nick assured him. The poor old sod needed cheering up, and it wasn't a lie, though Nick thought shunning the demon drink was a lousy idea. Off-watch at Rosetta Street police station for the rest of the afternoon, and less rulebound than Inspector Pass, he went straight off to have it out with Harry Glebe.

Even when shorn and shined to within an inch of his life for their passing-out inspection all those years ago, Harry had looked indefinitely shaggy and scruffy.

Now all that was totally definable. Sergeant Glebe, string-vested belly bulging over his Y-fronts, was a bloodshot mess who'd taken ten minutes to answer Flinders' hammering on his door. The Glebes had just bought a Monopoly-board token of a house on a new estate in Surrey, but inside it looked a slum.

Nick walked past Harry, breathing through his mouth until many windows had been opened. "It stinks like a Turkish wrestler's jock-strap in here," he stormed. "Oh, I just stepped in last night's supper, charming, leave your plates on the floor, surprise guests."

Harry grunted something and flopped down on a couch, shielding his eyes with one hand and groping for another can of beer with the other. Then he shouted for a while, until he was forced to join Nick, who had doffed his blazer, rolled up his sleeves, and was busy at the sink.

"You gay or something—kinky for washing up?"

"Jean will kill you if she comes back and sees this lot."

"Jean's gone." Harry, leaning against the wall by the spin-drier, bent his knees and slid down into a defeated squat. "Um—gone to stay with her mum for a family visit," he added without conviction.

Abandoning the sink, Nick folded his bubbled arms and accused, "So it's right, you've been knocking her about."

"Just the once—" Harry fell silent, shutting his eyes. "Bloody hell, we've been living in a goldfish bowl, everybody knows everything. Oh, that Yank bird's been blabbing. She poked her nose in here last week, her and Jean had their heads together—whisper, whisper." He made a formless gesture of resignation, disgust. "Doesn't matter."

"Does to me, sunshine. What's the matter with you, too much blood in the alcohol stream rotted your backbone? Can't do your job, bugged up your marriage. You bloody drunk—hitting Jean, and she doesn't come up to my shoulder even."

"She made me," Harry cried thickly, with such raw pain that Nick winced. The big man opened his eyes. "No, she never. I lashed out when she— We tried to paper over it, but I'm pig-sick and so is she. That was why she went—neither of us could stand it, knowing nothing was right. I wanted to say the words for how sorry I was, but that wouldn't have changed anything."

Struggling upright, he growled, "None of your business, coming here and laying down the law. You got no right to be here—shove off before I flatten you."

Lethally pleasant, Nick said, "You're not capable. Hands shaking, can't see straight, can hardly stand up. Look at me crossways and I'll chin you, mate or not. Pay attention: the warehouse caper, Ricky Ledbetter. Just between friends, did you pass out—or had Ricky bunged you, paid his way?" Poised to duck a punch and return it instantly, he was nonplused when Harry laughed hard enough to dribble down his stubbled chin. He shambled back to the living room and Nick heard a ring-pull tinkle.

When he followed, Harry raised the can in a toast. "Nothing like a pal, eh, Nick? And you're nothing like a pal. In with the rubber heels, are we?"

"You know better." Nick buttoned his cuffs and put an arm into a blazer sleeve.

"It doesn't matter, I'm finished. No, I wasn't paid off. Jean and me had—a difference of opinion that set me drinking well. But not on the job—not much, at least. Only, you know how it is when you have a heavy session—take a drink of water the next morning and

you're sloshed again. That, and pugged up in an empty office all night, I had tea in a flask. More whiskey than tea, but I was only passing the time."

He scratched his stomach ruminatively. "And I fell asleep. Dead to the world, first good kip I'd had in ages. Pete Levine's a jewel—he slipped over the road and tried to wake me, but no go. Keep that to yourself, mind. Peter told the rubber heels he stayed at his observation point all night, that was what he was supposed to do."

"You just fell asleep. Not for money, and you weren't drunk. Just nodded off."

Turning sullen again, Harry muttered, "I had a lot on my mind. Still have. Maybe I was drunk and never noticed. What's the difference? Get off my back, leave me alone."

Sergeant Flinders obeyed, glad when Harry didn't come to the door with him. Harry being unlikely to divulge his mother-in-law's address, Nick simply took the indexed pad from beside the phone in the hall.

"Sick time? You look fit enough to me—disgustingly so," alleged the CID skipper, Detective-Inspector Dennystoun. "We've lost DS Glebe, remember. Can't it wait?"

Nick winked and then he leered, Denny Dennystoun being that sort of fellow. "It's the old war wound, Skip."

"Oh, a woman. You should've said," Dennystoun cackled. "Right you are. But twenty-four hours max. Give her one for me while you're at it, randy bugger."

Justifying his boss's smutty mind, though not at all in the way Inspector Dennystoun imagined, Nick drove a round trip of three hundred miles to see one girl and then paid a call on another.

The light faded from Linda Kalp's expression once she'd opened the front door to his discreet tapping. "Bad time, Nicky, and I need to crack some books."

He was saddened as well as bone-tired from his travels, unsure whether the sadness was for himself or Ms. Kalp. Fifty-fifty share, probably. "Shouldn't take long, love. I really need to talk to you."

"Okay." She led him into the cottage's living room. He felt that if he stretched his arms his knuckles would graze the paisley-patterned walls. He took the chaise and Linda sat in the rocker, knees together, skirt tugged down, and feet flat on the rug. "So?"

"It's about Harry Glebe," he began. "And other things. You shouldn't have warned me off that way."

Her full lips tightened. "Don't quote regulations at me, I'm a civilian. I told you in confidence, as a friend."

Nick shook his head. "No, you don't get it. You shouldn't have told me because you shouldn't have known. *Couldn't* have known, if the thing was genuine."

"Now hold it. Whatever you—"

"Bear with me, dear."

He said it so mildly and sympathetically, she subsided.

"It came out of a clear sky, see, Harry screwing up over the Ledbetter job. How was it, days ahead, you could predict drink was that big a problem? Until the Ledbetter fiasco, the rubber heels had no interest in Harry Glebe. I've asked around. Harry has a reputation for bending his elbow off duty, but you could tar half the blokes in the Division with that brush. You were the only one prophesying disaster, telling me to watch myself."

Linda's color was high. "My God, Nicky! It wasn't like that! I—I can't go into specifics, but there was no plot against him, that's ridiculous. I warned you in good faith."

"That," Nick said evenly, "is why you're not doing this down at the nick, heading for a conspiracy charge. No offense, but you were the monkey and I want the organ-grinder."

"Forget how you could foretell the future—maybe you're a dab hand with Tarot cards. What about your heart-to-heart with Harry's wife? I know you've been talking to police families, wives and kiddies and that, but those were group meetings, general discussions. How'd you happen to start solo debriefings, especially with Mrs. Glebe?"

"We're getting into the confidentiality area," she warned.

"Fair enough, I'll deduce—it's what my lot are for. Somebody told you Harry Glebe was losing it, drinking heavily, drinking on duty—and they threw in the clincher, that he'd started knocking his wife about. Extra sensitive to women's problems, and good luck to you, that made you go see Jean—confirming that she'd had a right smack in the face, and not long ago. Did she tell you why?"

Confidentiality forgotten, Linda Kalp sneered, "Married to him, I'd do the same."

"Ah, she did tell you." Nick leaned back in the chaise. Within seconds, sadness deepening, he sat erect again. "I've just come back from seeing Jean Glebe. She trusts me—it must be the brother stuff. She says Harry hit her when she told him she'd been unfaithful."

"Making it okay, huh?"

"No. But Jean's a confessor, has to get things off her conscience, let the chips fall as they may. Me, it always seems selfish, that attitude. What d'you think?"

"Not my field," she countered crisply. "Cut to the chase, Nicky."

"Will do. Sad old tale of a one-night stand—half the partnership disposable as a throwaway razor. Jack the Lad charms a married woman, shows her a good time, holds doors open, takes her to restaurants. Flattering, exciting, where's the harm? Then she has three cocktails too many and it's down to Mr. and Mrs. Smith at a motel and the earth moving."

Acknowledging her cold glance, he said, "There's a twist coming up. The earth doesn't move for Jean—she just wants it to open up and swallow her. She refuses to have anything more to do with Jack the Lad—I think we both know who *he* is—apart from agonized chats on the phone. Life's full of ironies, ever notice? It's the lady who walks away and Jack the Lad who has to be throwaway razor. And he hates it, the way us men do.

"He works himself up to thinking this is the love of a lifetime and she can't be cruel enough to reject him forever."

"Sounds wrong," Linda commented, still coldly. "From my time with Mrs. Glebe, I'd characterize her as kind of passive and non-descript."

"You'd be surprised how many *femmes fatale* fit that profile," Nick assured her cheerily. "I'm not making this up. Jean told him to get lost, but he kept pestering and it probably made up her mind for her. Then Jack the Lad started sweating because Jean decided that the guilt was unbearable and she had to tell all to her husband.

"Naturally she assured our Jack that she'd never identify him. But put yourself in Jack's place. A wheel is about to come off—a delightful bit of jiggy-pokery can turn nasty. If she's dim enough to blab to her unsuspecting old man, who knows what she might spill down the road? Bound to be awkward careerwise—and healthwise, Harry being a big lad."

Linda laughed, breathily harsh. "Dynasty with a veddy Briddish accent. And they say women gossip."

"True, but it's more than swapping scandal, love. Harry Glebe has been framed and set up for the base crime of being a cuckold, and I won't have it. We're going to put it right."

"We," she echoed stonily.

"Me mainly, but you and Peter Levine will have to row in as well.

Levine was Jean's lover, if that covers a single bad hour or so in a motel, and he put Harry in the frame with some unwitting help from you. Harry drunk on a top-notch operation? Do me a favor—that never rang true, even if he was daft enough to believe it of himself. Low self-esteem, what with his marriage on the rocks. Me, I'm a bachelor, I can still see straight. If Harry wasn't bent and not drunk but did lose consciousness, could he have been drugged, slipped a sleeping pill? Affirmative—in that vacuum flask of 'tea' he'd taken to carrying."

As strikingly pale now as she'd been flushed earlier, Linda said, "It's only Jean Glebe's say-so that the affair was with—um, Mr. Levine. Could be she's covering for another man."

"What, Jean the Confessor? That one isn't in the lying business. Levine had her, Levine framed her old man. It crossed my mind from the beginning, but that was because Peter Levine's such a flashy little jerk. So I decided it was wishful thinking. It didn't fly—no motive. Levine doesn't need money on the side, so how could Ricky Ledbetter buy him? And why would he drop Harry Glebe in the mire when Harry was one of the few blokes at the nick with a good word for the twerp?

"But when Jean coughed up the name, it came into focus. Tomorrow I'll find out whether Levine wanted to ruin Harry in the hope that Jean would change sides and be up for grabs again, or whether it was a preemptive strike."

His listener was baffled.

Nick smiled bleakly. "Picture this. Sergeant Glebe is kicked out, then his wife says Levine was her lover. Harry kicks up a fuss, but now Levine can shrug it off as a bent copper venting spite on an innocent target, slinging mud."

"It can't be true," Linda whispered, addressing herself. "Why would he do all that for her when—"

Pretending to have missed the thinking aloud, Nick said lightly, "Pete Levine keeps pulling birds and pulling strings, that's the pattern. Like, compulsively. He pulled Jean, and when she elbowed him he pulled you. Then Jean sprang her confession scenario on him and he began scene-setting with you. It must have made his heart go pitapat when you steamed off to talk to her about being brutalized. Supposing she'd told you, of all people, who her lover had been? But she didn't. Levine was still golden and you'd seen the bruises to prove his story."

Nick paused, but it had to be said.

"Once Harry was nailed, Pete Levine dropped you. That should tell you something, love. You thought it was him when I came round, you've been waiting every night. One day *I'll* get a look like that in my own right—the day pigs fly. Don't kid me he hasn't spent a lot of time here—this bloody couch pongs of Anteus, I keep getting whiffs."

"Sherlock," Linda sniffed, cheeks wet. "How corny. He played me like a violin, the rat. Why'd he do that? I never suspected—he begged me not to tell anyone, said he was just laying out a case history and asking for advice to *help* Harry."

"Our Peter Levine's a good actor," Nick conceded. "He had *me* going, all that shellshock over Harry coming unstuck. He used you as backup: you're the stress expert and would confirm—sure it was genuine—that Harry's drinking had skidded out of control."

Linda came over to sit beside him. She sounded calm, though her eyes remained tearful.

"What now? Put it right, you said."

"Tomorrow Jean will say her piece to Inspector Pass of the rubber heelers." Nick sniffed sardonically. "Alf will have a fit, preach her a sermon, then he'll come down on your boy friend like a ton of bricks, only heavier—sharper edges. Alf is a righteous man, and, over and above that, he hates the sneaky kind."

"Let's hear it for Alf," Linda affirmed. And sobbed explosively.

Nick put his arm round her shoulders. "It could get nasty if Levine tries bluffing it out. We need you to testify that he was rigging the drunk stuff before Harry keeled over."

"There's more I can tell them. The louse spent most of an evening pumping me about sedatives and sleeping tablets—said every cop ought to have an overview of the scene."

"That will do it. But it will do your credibility no good, Linda. You're going to look a bit of a fool, and I don't know the form, but a bit unethical into the bargain."

"So be it."

She reached up and captured his hand, resting in a brotherly clasp on her upper arm. She gripped it hard. "Stay with me tonight—I don't want to be alone."

His mouth turned down at the corners and she cursed softly. "Get your mind above your belt. I want your companionship, not your body. Friends, remember?"

Nick spoke humbly: "Sorry, love. Mum never passed me off as her brightest kid."

Lying outside the duvet, Linda in T-shirt and briefs curled beneath it and against him, Nick heard most of the quarter-hourly chimes quaver from St. Asaph's, whose palsied reflection would be on the canal just beyond the cottage-bedroom windows. He heard the clock, he listened to Linda Kalp's quietly regular breathing, and he mourned for might-have-beens.



ON OUR COVER

Ruth Rendell, facing herself in the mirror here as the pseudonymous Barbara Vine (a scenario suggested by Clark Howard), is currently at work on a nonfiction book about Suffolk, England, where she and her husband Donald make their home. Her latest novels are *The House of Stairs*, as by Barbara Vine (published in March by Harmony/Crown), and *The Bridesmaid* (available in August from The Mysterious Press).

She has won the Edgar from the Mystery Writers of America three times (for *A Dark-Adapted Eye*, as by Barbara Vine, and two short stories, "The Fallen Curtain" and "The New Girl Friend," both originally published in *EQMM*); the Gold Dagger three times from England's Crime Writers Association (for *A Demon in My View*, *Live Flesh*, and—as by Barbara Vine—*A Fatal Inversion*); a Silver Dagger from CWA for *The Tree of Hands*; the 1980 Arts Council Award for *The Lake of Darkness*; and, twice, the East Anglia Angel Prize for Fiction, for *The Killing Doll* and *The House of Stairs*.

The Boston Globe has called Ruth Rendell "the best mystery writer anywhere in the English-speaking world." Her stories have appeared in *EQMM* since 1973, with her first short story, "Venus's Flytrap"—all but the most recent included in her impressive *Collected Stories* (Pantheon). "A Pair of Yellow Lilies" in this issue is her second of at least three we're privileged to bring you this year. A television series based on her Inspector Wexford stories is currently the hottest thing on BBC.

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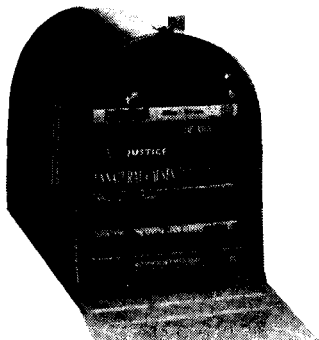
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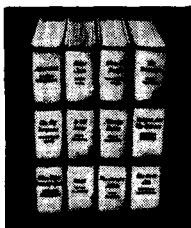
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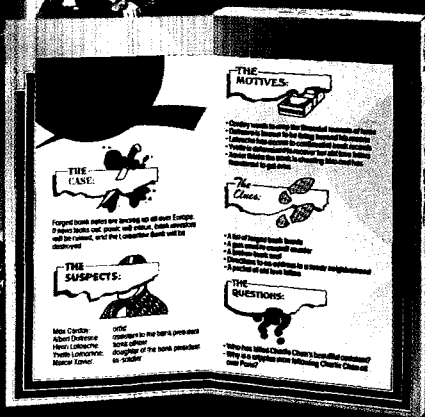
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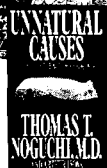
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